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EIGHT LECTURES

UPON THE

HISTORY OF JACOB;

DELIVERED DURING LENT, 1828, AT THE
CHURCH OF ST. LUKE, CHELSEA.

BY THE LATE

REV. HENRY BLUNT, A.M.,

RECTOR OF STREATHAM, SURREY;

LATE FELLOW OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE; AND CHAPLAIN
TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF RICHMOND.

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P R E F A C E

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

A SECOND EDITION of this little volume having been called for, the Author takes the opportunity of expressing his gratitude for the unexpected kindness with which it has been received. Having now, by the divine blessing, returned to his former sphere of duty, his necessary engagements preclude the possibility, even did he possess the power, of rendering this small work at all more worthy of an extensive circulation. He is therefore compelled to send it forth again with all its original imperfections, which he

fears are neither few nor trifling, only adding his sincere prayer that it may be made influential in leading some, especially of its youthful readers, to search for themselves the Scriptures of divine truth; to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the word of God: that they may “embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which God has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

With this desire the Author now commends this weak and imperfect effort to the blessing of that God, at whose command the feeblest means may be made effectual to the promotion of his glory, and without whom the wisdom of man is foolishness, and all his labour vain.

CHELSEA,
November, 1828.

P R E F A C E
TO THE FIRST EDITION.*

COMPOSED as these discourses have been during a season of great bodily weakness and sickness, the Author is fully convinced that they possess no claims whatever upon the attention of the public, and very few upon that of the Congregation to whom they are addressed. He is equally aware, that they form but superficial illustrations of divine truth; and that if they contain any thing of interest, they are indebted rather to the scriptural narrative which

* The profits of this Edition were devoted to the Chelsea Infant Schools.

they relate, or to the thoughts of those who have preceded him upon this well-trodden ground, than to any originality of remark, or ingenuity of exposition, achieved by the Author himself.

Two motives have, notwithstanding, induced him to commit these Lectures to the press: the desire during his temporary and unavoidable absence, of offering more especially to the younger branches of the Congregation, a memento of those truths with which he has laboured to impress them; and an anxiety to benefit an Institution * in the welfare of which he is

* The CHELSEA INFANT SCHOOL. The Author would earnestly recommend this invaluable Charity to the more extensive patronage and support of the parish at large; believing that if any check is to be given to the progress of crime, it will be, under the divine blessing, by pre-occupying the INFANT mind with the knowledge and love of God our Saviour, before the actual *habits* of guilt are engrafted upon the evil bias of a corrupt nature.

deeply interested, and which at present stands greatly in need of support.

The author cannot conclude this brief notice, without offering his most sincere and grateful acknowledgments to that large portion of the Congregation from which he has received such repeated and unequivocal marks of attention and kindness.

The distance of the Author from the place of publication, will, it is hoped, form an apology for any inadvertencies or errors of the press.

ISLE OF WIGHT,

May, 1823.

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LECTURES.

LECTURE I.

GENESIS xxv. 27.

"JACOB WAS A PLAIN MAN, DWELLING IN TENTS."

THERE are few subjects which so readily and so universally attract the attention of those to whom they are presented, as Biography. In general history we read of the rise and fall of nations, of the triumphs of conquerors, and the intrigues of courtiers; but all these things pass before us in such rapid succession, and are so totally irrelevant to our situations and conditions, that they seldom affect deeply

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the heart, or influence the life of the reader. Very different is the case when an individual, moving in the same sphere, and subject to the same trials as ourselves, is detached from the general group, and faithfully presented to us by the pencil of the biographer, in the interesting scenes so abundantly furnished by the vicissitudes of active life. In such instances as these, more especially when relating to the people of God, we are able almost to identify ourselves with the persons of whom we read; we participate in their difficulties, grieve at their sorrows, rejoice at their joys; and thus not only derive a transitory gratification, but treasure up much that is valuable for future service. Long after the history has ceased to interest us, we recollect the conduct of the holy men of whom it spake, their obedience to the commands of their heavenly Father, their meek submission to his will, their contrite acknowledgment of their own sins and

infirmities, and their continual experience of his faithfulness and love ; we derive fresh strength and awakened energy in the course which we ourselves are pursuing, and are oftentimes enabled, by the remembrance of such examples, to go on our way strengthened and rejoicing.

It is with the full conviction of this truth, and in the hope that a connected narrative of the life of a faithful servant of the Most High, as recorded by the unerring pen of inspiration, may present us with many very valuable lessons in our Christian course, that I have been induced to select the eventful and instructive history of the patriarch Jacob, for the subject of the Thursday morning Lecture, during the ensuing season.

The claims which this man of God possesses upon our attention, are indeed widely different from those of the generality of persons who form the subject of uninspired biography ; he was neither a monarch, nor a warrior, nor a philo-

sopher, nor one of the rich and noble of the earth, living in palaces "ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion,"¹ but, as the language of the text informs us, "a plain man, dwelling in tents." Yet does this plain man possess more to recommend him to the notice and observation of the Christian, than all the sceptred monarchs of Pagan antiquity; and we scruple not to say, that no titles ever bestowed upon the proudest sovereign of the world, by the most fulsome of his flatterers, would bear a moment's competition with that honourable distinction which the Almighty himself bestowed upon Jacob, viz., the remarkable adoption of his name into the everlasting title of the "King of kings:" "And God said unto Moses, This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations, The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of JACOB."²

The individual of whom we are about

¹ Jer. xxii. 14.

² Exod. iii. 15.

to speak, was the son of Isaac and Rebekah, the twin brother of Esau, the child of many prayers. Even before his birth great things had been predicted of him by the Spirit of the Lord ; that although the younger born, he should have dominion ; that he should be the progenitor of a great and powerful nation, and that they who sprang from his loins should be paramount to all the descendants of his elder brother ; that, as St. Paul explains it, he should be, in his own person, peculiarly the object of the love³ of God, and that his descendants should be an elect people,⁴ chosen of God, unto whom should be “ committed the oracles of God,”⁵ and of whom, as concerning the flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, should come.

These are, indeed, most lofty claims upon our attention and respect, and you will probably approach the subject before

³ Rom. ix. 13.

⁴ Gen. xxv. 23.

⁵ Rom. iii. 2.

us, if not with overweening anticipations of the rank and splendour, at least with high expectations of the perfect holiness and purity, of him, of whom we speak. Alas! the perfection of these qualities belongs not to the sons of men. It was in the Son of God alone that mankind have ever seen perfection arrayed in human form: it was the Lord Jesus Christ alone who could be truly called "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."⁶ We are indeed about to speak of one who was eminently a man of God, of one upon whom the God of love had set his seal, whose "name was written in heaven;"⁷ but of one, let it be remembered, who was also a descendant of fallen Adam, an inheritor of a corrupt nature and a deceitful heart—in fact, of one like ourselves, a *sinner*!

To say more is unnecessary—to say less would be both unwise and untrue; for it is one of the peculiar beauties of scriptural

⁶ Heb. vii. 26.

⁷ Luke x. 20.

narrative, that no veil is ever drawn across the frailties or the sins of those whom it describes; there is no flattery, and there is no detraction; we have the whole man faithfully placed before us, with all those grievous inequalities of temper, life, and conversation, which are the inevitable results of the flesh for ever "lusting against the Spirit;"⁸ his piety and virtues distinctly portrayed, that they may be imitated, his infirmities and errors as candidly avowed, that they may be shunned. Let us then intreat the guidance of the Holy Spirit of our God, that both these invaluable ends may be answered in the narrative we have selected; that, while witnessing, in the course of our inquiries, the occasional imperfections in the life of this holy man, we may be led to acknowledge and deplore their far greater prevalency in our own; and that, while tracing the remarkable evidence of his entire depend-

⁸ Gal. v. 17.

ance upon God, and faithfulness in the promised Messiah, we may seek for a more lively and influential faith in that great descendant of Jacob, in whom "all nations of the earth are blessed."⁹

In commencing our narrative from the very childhood of Esau and Jacob, we cannot but be struck by their early dissimilitude. Although nurtured by the same fond and affectionate parents, educated beneath the same roof, and partakers of the same advantages, they possessed little in common. The occupations and the joys of the chase formed the great business of the life of Esau, for he is in a very emphatical manner denominated by the inspired historian, "a man of the field;"¹ entirely devoted to the pleasurable pursuits of an active life, with but little taste for the contemplative enjoyments of religious meditation and privacy: probably such an one as we should now denominate "a man of the world;" a

⁹ Gen. xxii. 18.

¹ Gen. xxv. 27.

man devotedly attached to the pursuits, intimately acquainted with the habits and manners, and not a little in love with the friendship and the pleasures of the world in which we live. Such a man was Esau, even without darkening his character by the shades which the apostle to the Hebrews has thrown over it, when he denominates him “a profane person, and a fornicator:”² while, as if in marked contradistinction, we have the description of the text: “Esau was a cunning hunter”—“Jacob was a plain man.” “Esau was a man of the field”—“Jacob dwelling in tents.” The retired and simple habits of the younger brother are here contrasted with the worldly-minded wisdom of the elder: while the mode of living adopted by Jacob, viz., “dwelling in tents,” was probably an evidence of the same unworldly spirit, which is mentioned to the praise of Abraham’s faith, that “he sojourned in the land of pro-

² Heb. xii. 16.

mise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles."

The reflection which arises in our minds upon the first glance at the marked distinction between the brothers, is of this nature—strange, that in the same family, at the same time, and under the same advantages, two characters so totally opposite should have been formed. That the same treatment should have matured the cunning, worldly-minded Esau, ready to sacrifice every thing to the gratification of his pleasure and his appetite, and the retired and humble Jacob, devoted to the peaceful quiet of a religious home! A moment's glance into the world around us, a moment's reflection upon what we see, and know, and are, and we should rather ask, Is it not too often thus? Do we not frequently behold, with every human mean identically the same, with the same affection, and pains, and watchfulness, lavished with the same prodigality,

³ Heb. xi. 9.

do we not continually witness a similar result ? Do we not see in the same family, one child "a cunning hunter" after this world's pleasures and emoluments ; and another a "plain man," devoted to home enjoyments and domestic pursuits, content to dwell beneath the paternal roof, and to walk humbly with his God ?

The philosopher, with the book of human reason in his hand, assured that the infant mind is like an unwritten tablet, ready to receive with equal facility the good or evil with which we should inscribe it, hesitates to acknowledge the fact which all experience enforces upon him, because he is quite baffled and confounded in every attempt to reconcile so unaccountable an anomaly. The Christian turns to the book of inspiration, and finds all difficulty solved. He there discovers that the infant mind no longer resembles the unwritten tablet ; but the tablet wofully blotted, and deeply inscribed with Adam's guilt, and with

Adam's sin : that "every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually ;"⁴ that the grace of God, and *that* alone, can erase the natural impressions of evil, and give "the new heart and the new spirit"⁵ which are able to know, to love, and to obey God. He turns from the book of inspiration to his own bosom, and knows by his own experience, that all he reads is true, that it is indeed God, and God alone, "who hath made him to differ from another,"⁶ and that he has nothing which he has not received. That the grace of God, although it usually follows the sincere and faithful adoption of the means which his own will has appointed, is not restricted to those means ; and that although the child dedicated early to the service of God in the waters of baptism, educated consistently with those privileges, nurtured by the care and the

⁴ Gen. vi. 5.⁵ Ezek. xviii. 31.⁶ 1 Cor. iv. 7.

prayers of pious parents, will, we may humbly hope, be a "partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light:"⁷ yet that many who have been denied the advantages of that Christian education which ought to follow a Christian baptism, who have passed their infancy in neglect, their childhood in thoughtlessness, and their manhood in sin, have also been the objects of a Saviour's love; have been checked in their mad career, been plucked as brands from the burning, and having been made "willing in the day of his power"⁸ by the effectual striving of the Spirit of God, have at his bidding, accepted the free and full salvation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, "received the atonement,"⁹ poured forth the tear of penitence, and offered the acceptable sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart. Blessed be God, we may not doubt that there are many such as

⁷ Col. i. 12.

⁸ Psalm cx. 3.

⁹ Rom. v. 11.

these, who, having been brought through great tribulation, shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ascribing all their salvation to the free and undeserved mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and uniting their joyful voices with those around the throne in the "new song," "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."

The character of Jacob, strikingly conscientious and devout as we shall find it in the more advanced portion of the narrative, exhibits itself under circumstances by no means advantageous or prepossessing in the opening scenes. The very first incident which succeeds the text, disposes us to think but lightly either of his brotherly kindness or of his generosity.

Esau returns wearied with hunting, at a time when, probably, (from the opening of the following chapter,) a famine was raging in the land; and seeing

Jacob preparing his daily meal, he applies to him, in the language of importunate necessity. "Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint." Jacob, instead of cheerfully availing himself of an opportunity to supply the wants of a perishing brother, seizes, with great avidity, the favourable hour for acquiring the birthright which God had promised him, and replies, "Sell me this day thy birthright:" thus, in a moment of hunger, and indifference to the promised blessing, on the one hand, and extreme anxiety to obtain it on the other, the important bargain was concluded that was to transfer for ever to the younger son the right of primogeniture; which, at that time, conveyed the double portion of all temporalities, the especial blessing of the dying parent, and above all, the inheritance of the covenant, which God had made with Abraham, that from his loins Christ should come.

That Esau merits our censure for treating with indifference so unspeakable a privilege, has been decided by that writer of inspiration, who has affixed for ever the epithet "profane" to the man who thus, "for one morsel of meat, sold his birthright;"¹ and that Jacob deserves our warmest commendation for earnestly desiring such a blessing, there can be no question. But here we must pause; the means by which Jacob obtained the birthright were utterly unjustifiable, uncharitable, and unkind; and proved as much his want of faith in the Almighty to bring that to pass which God himself had promised, as it proved his want of tenderness towards his suffering brother.

If it be true that Jacob acted thus wrongfully in the circumstance which we have recounted, how shall we justify him in the very next incident in which we find him engaged—that memorable and deceitful transaction, in which, to obtain

¹ Heb. xii. 16.

the promised blessing, he, at the instigation of his mother, imposed upon the old age of his affectionate father, and overreached his unsuspecting brother? Is it possible that this could be the "plain man," whom we behold clothed in the garments of his elder brother, and personating the first-born? Could it be he who concealed his artifice under "the refuge of lies," not only declaring that he was Esau, and that the kid was venison, but even introducing the name and the providence of his God, to give greater colour to his abominable falsehood? "I have found it quickly, because the Lord thy God brought it to me?" When we read the guilty transaction,—we blush—not only for the parties concerned, but for the whole human race, that such a fraud could have been suggested and carried into execution, and this not in the tents of ungodliness, but in that single family, which of all the families of the earth, alone professed the

worship of the God of truth. How humbling to the holiest! how awful a warning to the most eminent of the servants of the Lord! "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall!" Let him who wilfully indulges in the smallest degree of known sin, observe how rapidly sin advances,—how fearfully it darkens as it advances; how soon the lie requires to be strengthened by the oath, and the oath to be supported by the tremendous blasphemy, which would, if possible, have made it appear that God himself was a confederate in the fraud:—"The Lord thy God brought it to me." Shall we then attempt to justify that conduct in Jacob, which we should deeply condemn in ourselves, and deplore in you? God forbid! It is vain to say, that Jacob knew the blessing was already his by purchase, having acquired it when he bought the birthright, and that he was therefore only possessing himself of what he considered his unquestionable right.

This is no extenuation. Isaac, his father, was a reasonable man, and a conscientious man; why not, therefore, plead the right before him, and convince him that he was about to bestow that upon Esau, of which Esau had himself already disposed. It is equally vain to say, that as the Almighty had consigned the blessing to Jacob, it was inalienably his own, and therefore might be obtained by any method in his power. Isaac was a holy man, as well as a reasonable and conscientious man; why not, therefore, recall to his recollection this, perhaps, long-forgotten promise, and enforce upon his conscience the duty and necessity of his compliance? Or shall we agree with those who say that "the offence of Jacob was certainly alleviated, if not entirely taken off, by the circumstance of Rebekah pledging herself to bear the blame?" No: the single injunction of the Spirit of God not to "do evil that good may come,"² aims a death-blow at all such

² Rom. iii. 8.

casuistry as this. The sin of deceiving a man into what is right, differs little from the sin of deceiving him into what is evil. The effect of the sin, we grant, is different—the moral turpitude may be different—but the sin against God remains unaltered; while, to imagine for a moment that Rebekah's pledging herself to bear the blame, "Upon me be thy curse, my son," would extenuate the guilt of Jacob, is indeed a low tone of Christian morals. There is but one Being who has ever said—who could ever truly say, "Upon me be thy curse." The compassionate Saviour, the truly tender parent, the Lord Jesus Christ—he, indeed, has not only made the astonishing offer, but he has proved, with his life's blood, his power and his willingness to fulfil it. But to whom does he address the encouraging declaration? Not to the sinner rushing headlong into guilt—to the man of subtlety and cunning, proceeding artfully to overreach his neighbour; but to the man

oppressed and borne down by a deeply contrite sense of sin committed, and sincerely lamenting with a godly sorrow, that he has grieved the Holy Spirit; that he has offended a good and merciful God; that he has contracted a load of guilt; that he has merited an everlasting curse. To him, to *you*, my brethren, if there be any here who feel the malady, and ardently desire the presence of the good Physician; to you the compassionate Saviour does indeed say, "Upon me be thy curse, my son." I have already borne it for every penitent and believing sinner; I have borne it for you; I will "not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax."³ "Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,"⁴ and raise your eyes to the cross on which I hung on Calvary, and "behold the hand-writing of ordinances that was against you, blotted out and nailed"⁵ for ever there,

³ Isa. xlii. 3.⁴ Heb. xii. 12.⁵ See Col. ii. 14.

when I was “made a curse”⁶ for men; “upon me” has been “thy curse, my son,” that believing in me you may obtain remission of sins, the full and perfect forgiveness which I have purchased. Come, therefore, and although you have treated me as an enemy, approach me as a friend! Come, and although you have deserved the curse, inherit the blessing! I have satisfied the justice of God, which you could not satisfy. I have borne the wrath of God, which you could not bear; the chastisement of your peace was upon *me*, and with my stripes you are healed.

This the fondest earthly parent cannot say. The tenderest mother, though she may have borne the shame, has never yet borne the curse for her sinning child; for “no man may deliver his brother, or make an atonement unto God for him, for it cost more to redeem their souls, so that he must let that alone for ever.”⁷ We must therefore be content to leave

⁶ Gal. iii. 13.

⁷ Psalm xlix. 7, 8.

this humiliating instance, as a blot in the character of Jacob, without apology and without excuse, only observing, that disgraceful as it was, God could forgive it, and God did forgive it, for the sake of the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."⁸ Blessed, for ever blessed, be the Lord, that he has thus laid help upon one that is mighty; that although he cursed the sin, he has opened a refuge for the sinner; that "the fountain for sin and for uncleanness,"⁹ which was unsealed on Calvary, has never since been closed, and that all who approach it, may partake of its healing streams, and, drawing near in penitence and faith, shall assuredly be made whole.

My beloved brethren, while the day of grace lasts, be earnest, be unceasing in seeking him whom Jacob sought, that you may partake of the forgiveness which Jacob found. "Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope;"¹

⁸ Rev. xiii. 8.

⁹ Zech. xiii. 1.

¹ Zech. ix. 12.

cling to the horns of that altar from which no penitent was ever torn ; plead all your weakness, your infirmities, your need ; “ cast all your care upon him who careth for you ; ”² and, as he has borne your curse, be assured he will also bear your sorrows and your difficulties ; and none shall “ pluck you out of his hands.”³ Lay upon him the burden of your sins, and receive from him the blessing of his righteousness ; and may a gracious and compassionate God not withhold from you the salvation which his own dear Son has purchased for all “ who name the name of Christ, and depart from iniquity.”⁴

² 1 Pet. v. 7.

³ John x. 28.

⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 19.

LECTURE II.

GENESIS XXVIII. 5.

“AND ISAAC SENT AWAY JACOB.”

“BE sure your sin will find you out,”¹ is one of those great truths of revelation which experience has fully justified, and which the life of Jacob will most abundantly exemplify. We have beheld him regardless of truth, of affection, of duty, determined upon obtaining, by sinister means, the blessing which the God of his father had already promised and ensured to him; we are now to trace the consequences.

Think you that the Almighty will deny Jacob the blessing which he so justly for-

¹ Numb. xxxii. 23.

feited? No! The purposes of God were neither to be traversed by Jacob's duplicity, nor by Isaac's opposition. The one would, if possible, have frustrated the intentions of the Most High by his disobedience, the other would accelerate them by his craftiness; shall then the omniscient Jehovah, to punish the waywardness of his creatures, alter his own determinations? Poor erring mortals like ourselves might, indeed, have found it necessary to have acted thus; but "God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"² Yes; God has blessed the favoured Jacob, and he shall be blessed; but crooked were the paths through which he sought the blessing, and sad and evil shall the days of the years of his pilgrimage be, and deep and bitter his repentance, before he beholds the faintest dawn of

² Numb. xxii. 19.

that sunshine, whose beams he fondly hoped would now play unceasingly upon his path.

We behold Jacob, at the opening of the present Lecture, the successful rival of his worldly-minded brother, the especially beloved son of Rebekah, and the blessed of his father—to the transient observer, a prosperous and a happy man. When shall we learn not to calculate happiness by external circumstances? When will the poor, the afflicted, and the destitute, be taught to believe that the gifts of our heavenly Father are far more equally dispensed than they imagine; that the rich are not necessarily happy, or the idle necessarily peaceful; that the heart alone knoweth its own sorrow, and that in many an envied lot, some root of bitterness has been planted, felt only by its possessor, which rankles within the bosom, and fixes its inextricable thorn, while all without is blossoming?

My poorer brethren, there is but one

possession which does not disappoint, which you cannot too earnestly covet, which, in every state and under every circumstance, can ensure happiness; and this a possession which, blessed be God, as riches cannot secure, so neither can poverty deny—a heart reconciled to God by Jesus Christ our Lord; and, as the sure and certain fruits of it, a conscience at peace with God, with itself, and with all the world. Obtain this, and you have obtained happiness, enduring happiness, which will not fly at the sight of poverty, or wither at the approach of death! Where are the joys of this world, of riches, pleasures, rank, of which their votaries can truly predicate the same?

It was the declaration of the wise king of Israel: “When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.”³ That the way by which Jacob obtained the blessing could not please the God of truth, we

³ Prov. xvi. 7.

may fearlessly assert. That his enemies were not at peace with him, the narrative before us sufficiently testifies. In vain did every external circumstance shine upon Jacob, a cruel and an irreconcilable brother had resolved upon his death; and, in the midst of prosperity, his very life became a burden to him, and he knew not how to avoid the blow which might, at any unguarded moment of domestic intercourse, be inflicted by the hand of so near a relative. At the suggestion, therefore, of Rebekah, and with the full consent of Isaac, Jacob resolves to forsake those tents in which he had so long resided, and where every treasured recollection spoke of a father's piety, and a mother's love. A happy, because a holy home, had long been his; but he was now to leave it. He was to enter upon a world of which, by experience, he knew but little, and to whose inhabitants his high and hallowed expectations, aye, even the God whom he served, and

the heaven to which he aspired, were strangers ; from whom therefore he could hope for little, either of sympathy or regard.

You, who know by experience the bitter feeling of leaving, for the first time, the roof under which you have long been partakers of every blessing, where kindnesses have been bestowed abundantly, and, at that season when kindness makes the deepest and most durable impression, where your first lisping petitions were offered at the throne of grace and your earliest impressions of good received, will not think lightly of the sacrifice for which Jacob was now called upon.

This was the first-fruits of the act of faithlessness in which he had borne so distressing a part. His "sin had already found him out," and, as its obvious and immediate consequences, he was sent forth a wanderer and an alien from that very country, his anxiety to obtain which had formed one motive for his late duplicity.

It must have been a bitter hour for Jacob when he thus quitted the tents of Isaac; his destination, by the desire of his parents, was Haran, the residence of Laban, his mother's brother, at a distance of more than four hundred miles; a long and wearisome journey at any time and under the happiest circumstances, but to Jacob, friendless and companionless, a penitent and solitary pilgrim, it must have been an undertaking of no common difficulty, and no ordinary danger.

Fearful as it was however, Jacob, confiding in the promised blessing of his God, hesitates not to undertake it; and, as he himself informs us, (in a subsequent part of his history,⁴) with only his staff in his hand, he sets forth upon his solitary journey. It was at the close of the first day's travel, when, wearied with the long and toilsome march of forty miles beneath an eastern sun, "he lighted upon a certain place," says the historian, "and tarried

⁴ Gen. xxxii. 10.

there all night," the heavens his canopy, and the stones his pillow. To a mind occupied as Jacob's must have been, with the fond recollections of home, with the desolating sense of his own utter solitariness and helplessness, and, above all, with compunctious visitings for the transgressions of which he had been so lately guilty, *that* sunset must have been a melancholy hour. Often must the sad reflection have crossed his bosom: "Why am I here?" and as often must conscience have returned the humiliating answer, "Because thy sin has found thee out;" and while this godly sorrow was thus working repentance unto salvation, many a pang must have been imparted by feelings of doubt and uncertainty, whether he were indeed under the special guidance of the Most High, the object of his pardoning love, and of his providential care. It was during these hours of darkness that God was preparing a message of peace and love for his benighted

soul. The shades of evening had now closed thickly around his pillow, when he was favoured with the following remarkable vision.

“He dreamed, and behold a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven : and, behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it, and, behold, the Lord stood above it.”⁵ A vision, indeed, most strikingly adapted to Jacob’s present state of mind, and highly calculated to impart confidence and comfort ; teaching him in no ambiguous manner, that poor and of little value as he might be in his own estimation, he was the object of the immediate guardianship and watchfulness of those angelic spirits who are “ sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation ; ”⁶ and, that widely separated as the heavens are from the earth, the connexion between them is most intimate and indissoluble ; that wherever God has a people, whether

⁵ Gen. xxviii. 12.

⁶ Heb. i. 14.

the inhabitants of the populous city, or the wanderers of the cheerless desert, they are equally the objects of the care and love of their heavenly Father ; and, that so especial is the providence of God, that one poor traveller, sleeping upon a pillow of stones, appears to exercise as much of the thoughtfulness and consideration of the King of kings, as the highest monarch upon earth, To Jacob such assurances, at such a time, must have been invaluable, for they convinced him that, deeply as his past conduct had offended God, the Lord had not cast away his servant ; that God was willing to receive his repentant child, and, for the sake of the everlasting covenant, to pardon and accept him.

My Christian brethren, many centuries have rolled away since Jacob lay upon his bed of earth, and beheld this cheering vision descending from that fount of light which no man may approach unto ; yet can we not read it at the present hour

without feeling that it wonderfully and sweetly harmonizes with our own experience, and with the dealings of our heavenly Father with ourselves. Although not the travellers of a desert, we are (and would that we still more strongly felt ourselves to be!) but strangers and pilgrims here, seeking "a better country, that is a heavenly."¹ And of what nature are the manifestations with which our merciful Father favours us at the outset of our heavenward journey? Are they not similar to this of Jacob? Does He not, when, with a sense of our own weakness, we are tempted to despond at the fearful separation which sin had made between God and us, when our conscience is writing bitter things against us, and every other feeling is absorbed in the overwhelming sense of our own helplessness and sin; does He not, during those hours of darkness, prepare a message of love for our souls? does he not

¹ Heb. xi. 16.

assure us that there is pardon for the penitent; peace for the humbled and believing sinner; that "there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus?" Does he not open our eyes to behold the ladder set upon the earth, the top reaching to heaven—that ever-blessed mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ—the only connecting link between earth and heaven, between man and God; the base of the ladder his human nature visible here on earth, the top of the ladder his divine nature, the immutable Godhead in heaven! and are not the messages of kindness, and reconciliation, and everlasting blessedness, with which we are favoured, and every one of which passes through this only appointed way, the angels descending to us, while our own prayers must ascend to God by the same ladder, must be offered up by faith in Jesus, and pass through him, "the way, the truth, and the life," the only intercessor with the Father?

You, who have with Jacob sincerely deplored your own infirmities and sins, will rejoice with him at the supernatural aid which God has offered you. You have seen, with the eye of faith, that ladder which "flesh and blood have not revealed unto you, but your Father which is in heaven."⁷ Every round of that ladder speaks joy, and hope, and strong consolation; and blessed, far above all earthly blessedness, is the poorest and most destitute among you, even though your head may rest upon the earth for your pillow, if your eyes have been opened to behold, and your hearts to receive, the consolations of this heavenly vision.

By Jacob this remarkable manifestation of the especial providence and love of God, appears to have been most gratefully received and fully appreciated; for his waking declaration was, "Surely the Lord is in this place." Here, even here,

⁷ Matt. xvi. 17.

I have found a protecting God : I am as much the object of his parental regard and continual watchfulness upon the sands of the desert, as in the tents of Isaac ; “ this is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of heaven.” These impressions, so powerfully imparted by the supernatural vision, were as fully corroborated by the heavenly voice ; “ For the Lord stood above the ladder, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac,” and then repeating the original promise of the land, continued, “ I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, . . . for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”

After such assurances as these, “ the desert,” to the eyes of the awakened Jacob, must have “ rejoiced and blossomed as the rose ;”⁸ no longer would he feel himself a solitary outcast, while the

⁸ Is. xxxv. 1.

God of his fathers was his companion; no longer would he be uncertain of the result of his journey, when the same God had pledged himself to continue with him unto the end.

Where is the convinced and enlightened Christian who may not sympathize in these feelings with this man of God? "Behold I am with thee," is the source of all our confidence: "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world,"⁹ is the foundation of the believer's joy. There are times, even to the most devoted Christian, when his hope burns with a more feeble light, and when he feels the corruptions of his fallen nature still unsubdued within his bosom. The faithlessness, which he trusted was a conquered enemy, raises in some new shape its hydra head, inducing him to doubt the truth or the love of the Saviour who has redeemed him; tempting him to despondency and despair; leading

⁹ 1 John iv. 4.

him to believe, after all which the free and sovereign grace of God has wrought both for him and in him, he shall still most assuredly be a cast-away. In these moments how blessed to the Christian's soul are such declarations as those with which the most high God now consoled the fainting heart of his servant, "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of:" or, as the same promises are in the writings of the New Testament reiterated to us, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee:"¹ "He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."² It is thus that when assailed by spiritual fears or despondency, you are enabled to look from yourself to Him from whom cometh your help, and who has said, "Look unto *me* and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."³ This is the believer's wisdom

¹ Heb. xiii. 5.² Phil. i. 6.³ Isa. xlv. 22.

and strength and happiness, "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith;"⁴ knowing that he is faithful who has promised, and that having by his grace called you even while you were enemies, and guided you by his hand through many a weary mile of this world's wilderness, he will not desert you now that you are reconciled to him by the blood of his Son. Even should your faith fail, and you cry unto him out of the depths into which you are beginning to sink, his hand will be still outstretched to save; and though the dark waters are passing over your soul, he will place you upon the rock which is higher than you, at whose base, although the tempests roar and the surges beat, "eternal sunshine settles round its head," where "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."⁵

In pursuing the narrative, we find that Jacob, sincerely as he believed, and

⁴ Heb. xii. 2.

⁵ Psalm xcvi. 11.

greatly as he rejoiced in, all the promises of God, was so far from imagining that this full and unqualified declaration of protection on the part of the Most High, would justify any negligence or indifference on his own, that the first act which succeeded the wonderful vision, was a solemn dedication of the place, of his property, and of himself, to the service of Jehovah. For we read, "Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for a pillow and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it, and called the name of that place Bethel."⁶

In other words, he erected a lasting memorial to the honour and glory of that gracious Being of whose presence and favour he was now fully assured; and so highly did the Almighty estimate this evidence of his devotion, that we find him twenty years afterwards reminding Jacob of this act and of this hour, saying,

⁶ Genesis xxviii. 18.

“I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar;”⁷ a lesson to us, my Christian brethren, to set up lasting memorials of the Lord’s merciful and providential dealings with ourselves.

We would then ask—has your heavenly Father, since you last assembled during this holy season in his house of prayer, visited you with many temporal and spiritual mercies? Have your worldly circumstances prospered, and has his hand been upon you for good? Have you tasted, perhaps drunk deeply, of the cup of sorrow or of sickness, and did God hear your cry, descend to your assistance, and assuage your sorrows, or give an unexpected efficacy to human means, and restore you again to those you love? Or, does the retrospect of the twelvemonth which is past, suggest that you have still higher blessings than these to acknowledge; that when darker shades than those which surrounded the sleeping

⁷ Gen. xxxi. 13.

Jacob had gathered round your soul, a merciful God enlightened your spiritual vision, and pointed out to you the only way of access to himself, and brought you near by the blood of his Son ! O ! if you have been partakers of all, or of any of these mercies, we trust that you have set up some memorials of them ; the deeply grateful heart, the calm yet rejoicing spirit, the truly devoted life, the increased and lively faith, the subdued temper, the chastened will, the consistently holy conversation—these are the Christian's "waymarks," by which all may "take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus."⁸

But Jacob did not content himself with a single act of devotion, however excellent or appropriate, for we are told that "he vowed a vow unto God, saying : If God will be with me and keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come

⁸ Acts iv. 13.

again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God."⁹ The nature of this vow was equally a proof of the moderation of Jacob's desires, "asking only bread to eat, and raiment to put on," and the reality of his faith in the promises which had just been vouchsafed him; the vow was in fact an echo of the promise, not intending to be merely conditional, and to say, "If God will keep me, then will I serve him," but evidently implying, *since* God has pledged himself to keep me, therefore will I devote myself wholly to his service; *since* God has promised to be with me, therefore "shall the Lord be my God." It was not then, as has been falsely represented by the enemies of revelation, the shrewd compact of an avaricious man to bind the Deity to his interests, but the overflowing of a grateful heart anxious to bind itself to its God; that love of God, which proceeds from the

⁹ Gen. xxviii. 20.

conviction that "He first loved us."¹ God had revealed himself to Jacob as a pardoning God, passing by the iniquity of his penitent, confiding servant, and the effect of this manifestation of undeserved mercy and love, was to unite the heart of that servant to his God for ever.

My brethren, we have endeavoured to apply the spiritual lesson taught by Jacob's pillar, more especially to you who have passed through trouble, or sickness and sorrow; to you, then, we would also desire to apply Jacob's *vow*.

Did your hour of trouble, your chamber of sorrow, your bed of sickness, witness no vows? Have you never, in adversity, said, "If the Lord will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on;" or, in sickness, If the Lord will raise me up again; or, in spiritual despondency, If the Lord will keep me in this way, that I may come to my father's house—

¹ 1 Ep. John iv. 19.

the house with many mansions, "then shall the Lord be my God?" And were not your petitions heard, and the solicited blessing vouchsafed, and the hour of spiritual despondency, or of natural terror and alarm, permitted to pass away? How, then, have these vows been kept? Have they been "as a morning cloud, and as the early dew?" When the terror of the grave departed, did the resolutions of sickness depart with it? and are you now eagerly seeking the giddy bustle of the world, to brush away the few lingering remains of broken vows and frustrated intentions? Suffer, then, the present example to act as a solemn memento to your conscience; believe that the God of all your mercies, who answered your prayers, has also registered your vows, and now grieves over the neglect of them; he, of whom you once said, "Then shall the Lord be my God," sees with a parent's feeling that you have forgotten him, and sends this message of love to your soul, still

willing to recall his wandering child, still desirous of bringing you to himself. Remember those hours of affliction and of weakness ; remember what you would then have felt, could you have been assured that you should have been in this place, in your accustomed health, to-day ! Twenty years after Jacob had vowed, God expressly reminded him of that vow. He is now mercifully doing the same to you ! O let it not be in vain ! Let the solemn season which is before you be employed in regaining the vantage ground upon which, by the mercy of God, you once stood ; retrace your steps, recall the feelings, and the resolutions of those long past hours ; dedicate yourself anew to the service of God ; come once more to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and devote “yourself, your soul and body,” to the glory of your Redeemer. Then, indeed, shall the Lord be your God, equally present to bless and comfort you in health and sickness, in sorrow and in

joy, in time and in eternity! Then shall you find, even while on earth, that “peace of God which passeth all understanding;” and when you have departed hence, “an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom and joy of your Lord.”¹ But if you still turn a deaf ear to him that speaketh from heaven; if you still forget what God has done for you, and neglect what you have promised him, we would solemnly charge it upon your conscience, that this is not the last time that you shall think of your wasted resolutions and of your broken vows. You shall be reminded of them upon another day! in another place! by another speaker!

¹ 2 Peter i. 11.

LECTURE III.

GENESIS XXIX. 20.

"AND JACOB SERVED SEVEN YEARS FOR RACHEL, AND THEY SEEMED UNTO HIM BUT A FEW DAYS, FOR THE LOVE HE HAD TO HER."

At the close of the last Lecture, we left Jacob at Bethel, where the Almighty had vouchsafed him so encouraging a vision, and where he had dedicated himself to the service of God by so remarkable a vow.

Many a weary day's journey still lay between him and the place of his destination, and much of uncertainty, danger, and fatigue, overhung his solitary path, yet such was the influence of the blessed assurances of the divine presence and protection, which he received on that

first night of his pilgrimage, that he proceeded on his journey the following morning with feelings of alacrity and joy, to which he had long been a stranger.

The 29th chapter, at which we resume the history, commences by saying, "Then Jacob went on his journey." The marginal reading is, "He lift up his feet,"—that being the more literal translation, and intending to convey the cheerfulness of heart to which we have alluded. The Jewish commentary upon the verse says, "His heart lifted up his feet;" very expressive of the buoyancy and light-heartedness with which he recommenced his travels. We may learn how widely the remainder of this long and wearisome journey differed from the first day's march, by the brevity with which the inspired historian recounts it; the four hundred miles are despatched in a single verse; for we read, "Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the East."

You, my Christian brethren, who were able to sympathize in our last Lecture with this poor traveller, in the outset of his solitary pilgrimage; who have known, by painful experience, what it is, to lie down with a heart ill at peace with God; who have been perplexed with many an anxious doubt and fear; and, perhaps, have carried about with you, for months and years together, a spirit weighed down by a sense of sin, a heart which alone knew its own bitterness: but who have now received the same assurances which Jacob did of forgiveness, of consolation, and support, and, by the mercy of God, have been led to that gracious Redeemer who alone can bind up the heart when broken, and cheer the spirit when sorrowful, and give remission of sin, you will readily enter into the feelings with which Jacob recommenced his journey, for they are the same blessed feelings with which you yourselves are travel-

ling. The way before you may be long and wearisome ; there may be much to humble, to harass, and distress you ; but if your feet be indeed “ shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace,” and you have for a helmet “ the hope of salvation,” we may not doubt that the consolation of Jacob will be your own, and that if your spiritual journey were hereafter to become the subject of the chronicler, it might, in most instances, be described in terms as satisfactory, though as brief as these, “ They went on their journey, and they have entered into the land.”

No sooner do we find Jacob arriving at the place of his destination, than we perceive that the same Providence which had guided him thither, is still “ about his path,” ordering and arranging all things for his future happiness. The first persons with whom he meets, are a company of shepherds, assembling with their flocks for the purpose of watering

the sheep; and while entering into conversation with them in the free and unrestrained manner natural in those unsophisticated ages of the world, divine Providence brings to the spot the very person for whom (as the Almighty had designed) the journey of Jacob had been undertaken—Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother. No sooner did Jacob behold her, than, probably prepossessed by her appearance, for we are told that she "was beautiful and well favoured," and certainly, deeply touched by the merciful kindness of God, in thus unexpectedly bringing his journey to a favourable issue, while he embraced her, he "lifted up his voice and wept"—tears of bitterness for his own faithless misgivings—tears of joy, that his difficulties were now at an end, and that the object of his mission was thus, as it appeared to him, so speedily to be obtained.

"Arise, my son, flee to Laban, my

brother, to Haran, and tarry with him a *few days*, until thy brother's fury turn away, then I will send and fetch thee from thence," had been his mother's parting speech. When he therefore had seen and loved Rachel, and had been brought into the house of Laban, and dwelt with him a few weeks, he must have believed that every day would be the last, and that he should soon receive the wished-for message of recall. Well spake the Prophet Jeremiah, when he said, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Jacob entered the house of Laban for a few days—he remained there *twenty years*. Truly has the Word of God declared, "We know not what a day may bring forth;" we know not what "shall be on the morrow." Most kind and merciful that it is so — sin has introduced too much of misery into the daily cup which all are called upon to drink, without

mingling the poison of to-morrow with the draught of to-day. It is true that there is much of sweet as well as bitter in the Christian's cup ; that if the Word of God has said, "the heart knoweth his own bitterness ;"¹ it has also said, that "a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy ;" that "love" and "peace" are among the promised fruits of the Spirit, but, alas ! they are fruits which never ripen thoroughly here below ; they require a brighter climate and a warmer sun to bring them to perfection ; and the dearest child of God will never know their full flavour, until he partake of them in that blessed country, "where the sun shall no more go down,"² and "where the Lord shall be their everlasting light ;" where "the tree of life,"³ on which alone these fruits grow in rich profusion, "yields her fruits every month, and the leaves of the tree are for

¹ Prov. xiv. 10.

² Isa. lx. 20.

³ Rev. xxii. 2.

the healing of the nations.”⁴ There these blessed fruits of the Spirit will indeed be fully ripened, the sinful anxieties which a corrupt heart will, even to the end, be continually fostering, will be removed, and the distracting sorrows, which at some period or other introduce pain and misery into the bosoms of the holiest of the people of God, will then be plucked out, and cast away for ever.

In entering the dwelling of Laban, Jacob had entered the dwelling of a covetous man, and an idolater, who, although he had not renounced a nominal dependence upon God, had forsaken the true spiritual worship of him. In the company, and especially in the service of such a man, there was little good to be expected; and we accordingly find, that after Jacob had been with him a month, Laban, under the most plausible professions of disinterestedness, secures the service of his helpless relative, by agree-

⁴ Rev. xxii. 2.

ing that Jacob should serve him seven years, before he bestows upon him the promised Rachel. To Jacob, this portion of his servitude passed happily and contentedly, and was, probably, the most innocent and the least disastrous period of his life. Every thought of the difficulties of his situation, of the labours and the toils which were increasingly gathering around him, was forgotten in the one heart-engrossing feeling which possessed him; so did this sweeten every trouble, and enhance every enjoyment, that the inspired writer assures us, "Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." No other feeling of the human mind could have so shortened and sweetened the term of that lengthened bondage. Ambition, avarice, fear, and a host of similar passions, will all make the bond-slave obedient to the beck of the hardest taskmaster, and ready to labour even in the fires, for the accomplishment of

its object ; but there is none, save love, the master-passion of the human heart, which can enable its possessor to render not only a willing, but a happy and joyful obedience ; which makes him feel every demand upon his time, his thoughts, his energies, as too small, too poor, to bestow ; which induces him when he has done all, and more than all that is demanded, to feel sorrowful only that more had not been required, that he might have borne still stronger witness to the inexhaustible feeling from which his obedience flows.

My brethren! for what, do you imagine the great Author of our being implanted in us so astonishing and so resistless a feeling? To lavish it upon the poor sinful creatures by whom we are surrounded? To waste it upon some fickle object of our fond and foolish caprice, which, like the gourd of Jonah, “comes up in a night, and perishes in a night?”⁵ Is this probable; is it possible? O no! The whole

⁵ Jonah iv. 10.

tenor of God's revealed word convinces us that He who made the human heart, and endowed it with this extraordinary capacity, made it and endowed it expressly for himself. That every application of these all-powerful feelings which is not in complete subserviency to the one great purpose of their existence—the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord—is an act of robbery towards God. He has said, “My son, give *me* thy *heart*,” and he must possess the whole heart, or he will reject the blemished sacrifice. All religion is intended to produce this principle of love; a *grateful love* to God, because “he first loved us,” and has enabled us, through the promise in his dear Son, to look forward to the “recompence of the reward;” and a fervent *disinterested love* of God, from the knowledge of his attributes and his character revealed to us in Jesus Christ as altogether lovely. He who has given you a heart abundantly qualified to love, thus offers himself to

you as the only object upon whom the feeling, infinite as are its stores, may exhaust itself without sinfulness, and without excess. Other objects may, and indeed ought to be loved, dearly, fondly, and unceasingly ; but God alone is to be loved, with all the unbounded feelings of the heart. This is his language of mercy to every child of his blessed family : ‘ For you I have given my Son, my own and only begotten Son ; and I myself am ready to draw you to him, that you may know and receive him : though you have sinned, I do not desire your punishment ; though you have forfeited life, I have no pleasure in your death : come unto him that you may be saved ! All I ask of you is, that you should love me with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.’

This is the test of vital religion ; the great and palpable distinction between the man of God and the man of the world. Both may worship in the same temple—

offer the same prayers—kneel at the same altar; while the latter feels nothing, knows nothing, thinks nothing of this love to God, and the former not only loves him, but with so much sincerity and ardour, that he is able to say with the Psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee.” Can we conceive a greater difference than must be perceptible to the eye of God between two such worshippers? If there be a proof needed of the great internal change, which must take place in every human heart, before it is fitted for the society of heaven, and an eternal residence near the throne of the Almighty, surely an awful proof is here; only make the subject before you one of individual, of personal inquiry, and you will confess that there is. You did not by nature love God; perhaps you do not now love him; then it is evident that you could not be happy in his company, that you could not

rejoice to find yourself in his immediate presence. Alas! then, you are not educating for heaven; your feelings are not in unison with those of its inhabitants; your heart could not rejoice, or your voice harmonize with theirs. You would feel yourself a stranger in the midst of that loved and loving multitude; you could not unite with them in the new song; the never-ceasing praises of their boundless love would be discord to your ears.

Think seriously of this, I beseech you, my beloved brethren! probe yourselves deeply, to ascertain whether the religion you profess has taken root in your *affections*, the seat of all true and scriptural religion. Is the heart influenced by it? Does it burn within you at the thoughts of these things? or is it alive to every other theme—kindling at the name of other friends, but cold, languid, dead, to the name of Jesus, and the soul-inspiring themes of God and heaven? It is melancholy to think how much of the

semblance of spiritual life may exist while the reality is absent. There may be a regular attendance upon all the outward duties of religion, there may be a conscientious observance of the laws and ordinances of God, and an habitual respect and reverence, and fear of him, while there is not a single spark of heartfelt, influential *love*, sanctifying every thought, and word, and work, to the glory of God.

It was the possession of this feeling which so eminently characterized the early disciples of our Lord, which enabled them to estimate the heaviest trials, the severest persecutions, which man could invent, as “the light affliction which is but for a moment,”⁶ compared with the exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which they were anticipating. It was the thought of “being with Christ, which is far better”⁷ than the happiest portion here below, that gilded all their

⁶ 2. Cor. iv. 17.

⁷ Phil. i. 23.

sufferings, and made them ardently long, while they patiently waited, for their summons into the presence of Him of whom the apostle says, "Unto you therefore which believe *he is precious*."⁸ If you are conscious that you do not possess this love of God, seek for it early and late, search for it as a hidden treasure until you find it; you cannot find it except you be at peace with God through Jesus Christ; for you cannot love even a fellow-creature, because you are told, or because you think it a duty to love; you must first see something attractive in the object of love, or you must be sensible that you yourself are loved; thus is it also with regard to God. You cannot love him because the Bible commands you, or because the preacher urges you; you cannot love him until you know him as the Being full of kindness, full of mercy, which he really is; until you believe what he has himself assured you, that "God is love;"

⁸ 1 Pet. ii. 7.

until you have a good hope through grace, that he has "blotted out as a thick cloud your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins," and beholds you with tender compassion through the Son of his love, the Lord Jesus Christ. Obtain this blissful feeling, and it will amply repay you for all the anxieties of the search. Nay, if you are even required to sow for it in tears, the harvest will richly reward you, for you will reap in joy. Religion will no longer be a gloomy subject, or its duties a hard service ; you will be called indeed to labour, but it will be a labour of love ; you will be constrained to walk in the "straight and narrow way," but it will be "the love of Christ which constraineth you ;" and though, like Jacob, your years of servitude may be many, and your labours numerous, you will, in the end, with sincerity and joy, declare, like him, that they have "seemed but a few days," for the love you have to that Being for whom you laboured.

In resuming the narrative before us, we find that Jacob had still new lessons to learn in that painful and humiliating truth upon which we dwelt in our last discourse: "Be sure your sin will find you out." The seven years of servitude are, indeed, over, but Rachel, the promised reward, is still withheld. Laban, by a most wicked and abominable fraud, deceives Jacob into the marriage of Leah, the elder sister; mocking him, when the deceit had proved successful, by a reference to a custom, which there is every reason to believe never existed, viz. that the younger daughter could not be married before the first-born. It was thus that he, who had deceived his own father, receives the punishment of his sin, by being deceived in turn by his father-in-law—thus that Jacob was to learn that the Lord will not away with the iniquities of his people; that though they "find a place for repentance," and are again accepted in the Beloved, the Almighty teaches them,

as Gideon “taught the men of Succoth,”⁹ by “the *thorns* and *briers*” with which he scourged them, that they have “erred and strayed from his ways like lost sheep;” that, if they will wander from the fold, although “the good Shepherd knows his sheep,” and will “leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it, and when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing,”¹ yet they must not be surprised to be brought back wounded and lacerated, smarting from the effects of their own folly and sin.

A new term of servitude now opens upon Jacob, who, though permitted to marry the beloved Rachel, is required to labour for his avaricious kinsman seven years longer, at the close of which we are not surprised to find him, under the divine direction, anxiously desiring to depart.—“Send me away,” is the language of Jacob, “that I may go unto mine own

⁹ Judges viii. 16.

¹ Luke xv. 4, 5.

place, and to my country." Jacob had in Laban's house obtained his wives, and his children, and his cattle, and he was now in a situation to establish himself with respectability in any quarter of the land—but he remembered that this was not his promised home; that the God of his fathers had revealed to him, that the land on which he lay at Bethel, the whole land of Canaan, should be the possession of himself and of his seed for ever.

In this declaration, therefore, of Jacob, "Send me away, that I may go to my own country," there was something more than the mere longing of the natural man for the land of his nativity; we behold in it the strong and influential faith of these ancient patriarchs, believing implicitly the promises of their God, that the land, of which not an acre belonged to them, should, in due time, be wholly theirs; that their seed should be as the stars of heaven, and that from

their loins should spring the Saviour of the world. It was thus that not only Abraham, but Jacob also, "rejoiced to see Christ's day, and saw it, and was glad."² In looking to Canaan, they looked to the heaven which it typified, and seeing those promises afar off, "they were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth,"³ and that they "desired a better country, that is, an heavenly."

Such is the beautiful comment of the Apostle to the Hebrews, upon the faith of the patriarchs. My Christian brethren, these were the feelings which made Jacob desire, as soon as his services were finished, to be dismissed, that he might return to his country and his home. And ought not these to be supereminently the feelings of you upon whom the ends of the world are closing? does not your daily experience, as well as the word of

² John viii. 56.

³ Heb. xi. 13, 16.

God, assure you that “here you have no continuing city?” Can you truly say, that you are “seeking one to come?” Doubtless the ties by which Jacob was bound to the land in which he had lived so long, and, in some respects, so happily, were powerful and numerous; but all those ties were broken at the thoughts of Canaan, and the desire of being there. None of you whom I address, are without some ties which fetter you to earth; but while as Christians you delight yourselves in them, as the mercy of our heavenly Father permits and intended, jealously watch lest they bind you too closely to earth—lest they keep you too far from heaven. Beware that the gifts widen not the space between you and the Giver! that a beloved parent, husband, or child, engross not your whole heart, and induce an overweening desire to linger in the land of your servitude. “This is not your rest,” is sounded in our ears by every passing bell; are you

then striving to hold these ties so loosely, that, at the word of your God, you could be content to separate them for ever? It is, indeed, no less your interest, than your duty; for doubly painful will be the pang of separation, if it come unlooked for, and find you unprepared. Learn to think habitually of these earthly blessings, not as the gift, but as the loans of your heavenly Father, which may be resumed at any moment that his sovereign Will shall call for them; and, to obtain these feelings, live continually as on the threshold of heaven, "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of God,"⁴ cultivating that unworldly posture of mind, and spirituality of heart, and, above all, that love for your Redeemer, which will enable you, when, like the beloved apostle, you hear the voice of your Lord, saying, "Surely I come quickly," to reply with sincerity and joy, "Even so come, Lord Jesus."

⁴ 2 Peter iii. 12.

Thus, when the close of your services here on earth has arrived, and you have done the work which God has given you to do, there will be no impatient repining, no querulous desire for a little longer respite; it will be enough for you to know, that He who has condescended to employ you has no further need of your services here below, but that "there remaineth a rest for" you among "the people of God,"^b and the language of your heart will be, in all meekness and humility, "Lord, send me away, that I may go to the place and to the country" which thou hast prepared for me, through the love of thy dear Son.

^b Heb. iv. 9.

LECTURE IV.

GENESIS xxxii. 11.

**"DELIVER ME, I PRAY THEE, FROM THE HAND OF MY
BROTHER, FROM THE HAND OF ESAU."**

ENGAGED as we have now been for some time past, in considering the important passages in the life of Jacob, we cannot help experiencing feelings of disappointment, that we have never yet beheld him in any situation, of which we could truly say, "This is happiness." We commenced his life with the prophetic assurances that God should give to Jacob "of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine;"¹ that cursed should be every

¹ Gen. xxvii. 28.

one that cursed him, and blessed every one that blessed him ; and yet, throughout the whole period of which we have hitherto spoken, although more than fourscore years had passed over him, we have found him still a dependant, enjoying, indeed, much of the protecting presence and guidance of his God, but by no means distinguished for worldly affluence or prosperity.

We are now, however, to behold him in a new character, as a wealthy man, accompanied by his wives and numerous family, surrounded by his oxen and his asses, his men-servants and his maid-servants, and returning to his own country and his own place.

If we have, in the former part of Jacob's history, had occasion to observe how little cause there is for repining, although our lot be placed among the poor and the destitute, so long as we possess a well-grounded hope that the Lord is our God, and we are his people,

we shall now have equal reason to remark, how little cause there is for exulting, although the highest worldly advantages be our own, unless accompanied by the same blessing, the continual presence, and abiding influence of our Heavenly Father, reconciled by the blood of his Son.

We learn, from the beginning of the 32d chapter, that Jacob, having entirely freed himself from Laban, and about to return to his father's house, was obliged to pass through the country of Edom, which was in the possession of his brother Esau. The last tidings which we heard of Esau, were, that, deeply exasperated at the duplicity of Jacob, he had resolved to take away his life. It was to escape this peril that Jacob had been so long an alien and an outcast from the parental roof; while, therefore, we feel how striking an evidence it offers of Jacob's implicit trust in the Almighty, that, at the command of God, he should thus venture unarmed through the ter-

ritories of one so hostile and so powerful as his unreconciled brother, we cannot help feeling considerable anxiety as to the manner in which he will be received. Will Esau, now that the hour of vengeance, for which he has so long waited, has arrived—will he fulfil the threatening, which has been for twenty years in abeyance, and destroy the helpless Jacob, his wives and his little ones, and possess himself of the prey? Or will the natural sympathies of our nature be awakened within his bosom, and induce him to meet his enemy and his supplanter, as a brother and a friend?

If we, my brethren, cannot but feel some interest in the result of these inquiries, what must have been felt by Jacob? It requires but little knowledge of the human heart, to be assured that a time of intense anxiety and trial was approaching him, and that the possession of all the worldly advantages with which the Almighty had so lately blessed him,

would rather tend to increase, than diminish those anxieties, by holding out only a richer booty to the sword of Esau and his followers.

During his years of servitude, doubtless, Jacob had often thought—If these weary years were over—if I had but obtained Rachel for my wife, and the affluence which the Almighty has promised me for my worldly portion, how perfect would be my happiness; how utterly beyond the reach of any outward circumstances to affect or trouble it! Both these desires had now been granted; Rachel had become his wife, and the wealth of Laban had by the remarkable interpositions of the Almighty, passed into Jacob's hands; but where was the unruffled happiness for which he had panted? Like the horizon, it had fled from his approach!

And is it not thus, my brethren, with many among yourselves? Have you not often placed some wished-for object be-

fore your eyes; some darling scheme; some eagerly anticipated connexion; some expected aggrandizement of wealth or station, with the acquirement of which, you confidently believe that all your desires will be fulfilled, and your worldly happiness be unspeakably promoted? It is in vain we tell you that you will assuredly be disappointed; that you carry an immortal soul within you which nothing finite, nothing transitory, can fully satisfy; this is one of those points upon which the words of the preacher are wholly inefficient. Experience will convince you, but nothing short of this can avail. If we were even able to demonstrate that it had been so in every other instance, you would still believe your own case to be an exception; you would say, My hopes are built upon a better foundation; I know what I am expecting; I have well considered its incalculable advantages; I have not entirely excluded the Almighty from my visions of future happiness, and therefore I do

not fear that they should disappoint me. Alas! you will not know until you enter upon the possession of this anticipated happiness, how little the Almighty has, in reality, been considered in these scenes of worldly bliss, and how much the pleasures of time and sense have predominated. What, then, will be the inevitable consequence? That if you are a child of God, you will assuredly experience disappointment in every enjoyment short of God himself. There will always be some trial or some alarm, meeting you (like Jacob) before the first dawn of bliss has passed away, to convince you of its insufficiency, and to prevent you from resting in it. Wherever you propose to nestle, there your heavenly Father will plant a thorn; until you are driven, like a bird, from spray to spray, and from leaf to leaf, and taught by painful experience, that God, and God alone, is from everlasting to everlasting the "dwelling place"² of his people.

² Ps. xc. 1.

But we must return to Jacob, that we may learn by his example to prepare for the trials which we cannot avert. We are told that he first sends messengers to Esau to endeavour to deprecate his resentment, and to obtain his favour, "and he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau, Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now; and I have oxen, and asses, and flocks, and men-servants, and women-servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight."³

If the most unaffected courtesy united to the most sincere humility, could have availed to soften the heart of Esau, surely this message of kindness must have brought back an answer of affection and forgiveness; but no such effects were produced. The messengers returned to Jacob without a word of tenderness in reply; nay, rather with intelligence

³ Genesis xxxii. 4, 5.

which might have appalled the boldest heart—"We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him." This was indeed most fearful news for Jacob; truly it verified the experience of the Psalmist in after days: "I labour for peace, but when I speak to them thereof they make them ready to battle." "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed, and he divided the people that were with him into two bands, and said, If Esau come to the one company and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape."⁴ Thus leaving no human means unattempted to avert the impending calamity, uniting the wisdom of the serpent to the confiding simplicity of the dove, and by this wise and prudent arrangement, ensuring (however hostile might be the intentions of his brother) the safety of at least a portion of his family and his property.

Genesis xxxii. 7, 8.

It may perhaps be said, all the means adopted by this man of God might have been adopted by any other man under similar circumstances. They were proofs indeed of forethought, prudence, and a sufficient degree of worldly wisdom, but there is nothing which evidences the superiority of the godly man over the worldly man in all this. My brethren, we acknowledge it; and we will acknowledge it in more than the instance before us; we will confess that the observation would equally hold good in other cases as in the subject of our present history. We readily admit that there are many circumstances in life, in which, to the outward observer, the real Christian and the merely moral and upright man of the world, appear to act from similar motives, and with equal wisdom; there are even some in which the worldly man will appear to the greater advantage, and seem to take the higher ground, and to act perhaps with more decision and mag-

nanimity than the Christian ; and had you beheld Jacob marshalling his families, his flocks, and his herds, on the present occasion, this might have been your opinion of the incident before us. The bold man would have said, Why did Jacob thus cowardly make arrangements only for defeat ? Why did he not endeavour to defend what was so justly dear to him ? The timid man might have said, Why, when in such imminent peril, did he not at once turn and fly, and thus, since opposition was so evidently useless, secure all that God had given him ? My brethren, the Christian's answer to both these inquiries is equally obvious—Jacob was in the path of duty, following the directions, and marching under the commands of his heavenly leader, therefore he could not fly. But Jacob had already learnt by bitter experience the danger of hastening blessings by unjustifiable exertions ; he had seen that the weapons of human warfare, violence, deceit, and

subtlety, did but injure the cause they attempted to promote; he had deeply and justly suffered formerly for obtaining the blessing by an arm of flesh, he was resolved not to promote the fulfilment of it by the same unhallowed means, therefore he could not fight. The bystander could enter into neither of these motives, and might therefore fairly make the objections we have imagined.

It is thus that the Christian so often appears contemptible in the eyes of the men of this world. They cannot appreciate his conduct, because they know not the laws by which he is governed. For instance, you are in difficulties, and a single step would place you beyond the reach of them—a trivial act of injustice, or a little equivocation, known only to your own conscience and to God, or the evincing what is termed a proper spirit, would at once emancipate you: to the mere man of the world it is perfectly inexplicable that you do not take this step;

he sees no impediment, and therefore cannot conceive that anything but obtuseness of intellect, or weakness of judgment, could make you hesitate. These are cases very trying to the feelings of the natural heart; you perceive as clearly as those around you, the advantages which a little deviation from the straight and narrow way would purchase you. But then you "hear a voice they cannot hear, you see a hand they cannot see," you feel that to your own master you stand or fall, that that master has already drawn the line upon which you are to walk, and that in comparison with his approval, the applause or censure of the whole world is but as the dust upon the balance. The question you ask therefore is simply, What does the Lord require of me? and having ascertained (as far as the grace of God enables you) what is the will of your heavenly Father, you must pursue it through evil report and good report,

undeterred by the clamours of designing enemies, and uninfluenced by the opinion of mistaken friends. You will neglect no means which are perfectly compatible with the will of your God; you will adopt none upon which you cannot most conscientiously invoke his presence and his blessing; and having employed the means, you will leave the event to heaven, casting all your cares upon God, knowing that "he careth for you."

But we must endeavour more minutely to apply the instructive incident before us. Do we, at the present moment, address any who are placed in circumstances of peculiar difficulty or trial? Do these difficulties assail you upon the course which you have every reason to believe God has appointed for you to walk in? and are you sometimes tempted to think, if this were really the path of duty, should I so continually meet these hindrances and these difficulties? Let the example before you suggest conso-

lation and encouragement. God himself had commanded Jacob to enter upon the journey, to travel the very road upon which we find him : it could not therefore be a question whether he were in the path of duty, and yet he had proceeded little more than a week upon the appointed way, when he encountered the appalling difficulty of which we speak. Be not, therefore, led to doubt whether the path upon which you are walking be of God's appointment, because only it is difficult. The spiritual path of the Christian is never one of unmixed gratification. He, who himself put on a crown of thorns, never intended that his followers should wear a crown of flowers. He who has told you to take up your cross daily and follow him, well knew that you would not be able truly to follow him without having daily crosses to take up. He who promised, that if you suffered you should also reign with him, loves his people too dearly to withhold

that which is so essential to the fitting them for himself. "Beloved," says St. Peter, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." The Christian's course is, indeed, "from a cross to a crown," and, though we would not have you seek crosses, God forbid that you should shrink from them, when fairly encountered in the cause of Christ, and in the way of his commandments. But do you still further ask, If my situation, difficult as it truly is, be that which Providence has appointed me, and if, therefore, I may not timidly fly from it, how may I hope to be enabled to persevere? we again say, observe the example before you, Jacob did not fly, neither did he fight; his refuge was in prayer. Carefully lay this to heart—

“the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.”^s Happy would it have been for the Church of Christ, if his followers had, in all ages, remembered this; happy for you, my brethren, if you are never tempted to forget it; you will not conquer by resistance, but like Jacob by prayer. Prayer will furnish you with weapons from the armoury of heaven—weapons, not of offence, but of defence. A throne of grace is, to the Christian, the citadel where he will always find a protector to aid, and the home where there is always a Father to listen to him. “I must tell this to my God,” was the affecting observation of a Christian slave, while writhing under the lash of a cruel taskmaster! There was no one else who would hear him, no other being who could sympathize with him or relieve him. How many are the crosses of the Christian which ought only to be divulged to this never-failing friend; how

^s 2 Cor. x. 4.

many sorrows which can be poured into no bosom but that of his Redeemer! It is thus, that when you are weak, then are you strong; when, with the prophet, your "eyes fail with looking upwards,"⁶ and you cry, "O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me," then you are sure of victory.

Very interesting is it to the Christian to observe this method of relief so plainly marked out by the conduct of the patriarch, whose life we are reviewing. Follow Jacob from the scene of all those prudent arrangements to which we have adverted, go with him from the field into the tent, and behold how he is employed: you will find him on his knees before the footstool of his heavenly Father, acknowledging that every other aid is vain; and that, after all his efforts, his strength is in the Lord his God. Mark the language in which he thus pours out his overburdened soul before the mercy-seat:

⁶ Isa. xxxviii. 14.

“O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee ; I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shown unto thy servant ; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau ;”⁷ for “thou saidst, I will surely do thee good.”

Observe the humility, the gratitude, the confidence which these petitions breathe. How worthy the imitation of the Christian, how admirable a model for ourselves ! They are grounded simply upon the covenant into which the Almighty had entered with these holy men of old, “the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure ;” and is not this also the Christian’s strength in prayer ?

⁷ Gen. xxxii. 9.

When you pray, said our divine Master, say, "Our Father, which art in heaven." It is "the spirit of adoption,"⁸ which can alone enabled you to address the Almighty thus; possessing this spirit, you pray to a God with whom you are already in covenant: your petitions are grounded upon a solemn promise; you speak to One who has pledged himself to hear the petitions of them that ask in his Son's name, and therefore, while you know and acknowledge that you are unworthy of the least of all the mercies which God has showed unto his servant, you are enabled to come boldly unto the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. "O that there were such a heart"⁹ in every one of us! then indeed we might hope that the "words of our lips, and the meditations of our hearts, would be always acceptable in the sight of God, our strength and our Redeemer."

⁸ Rom. viii. 15.

⁹ Deut. v. 29.

Again, observe the gratitude visible in this address. He reminds God of what He had done for him, feeling assured by this of what He will do; "With my staff," and nothing but my staff, "I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands;"¹ how blessed, how multiplied! If this argument were powerful in the mouth of Jacob, who only reverted to temporal blessings, surely it is irresistible when flowing from the heart of the true believer. Behold, O heavenly Father, what thou hast already done for me! It is thine own work, thine own undeserved mercy: by the grace of God I am what I am. Thou wilt not forsake me now. When thou first beheld me, I was an alien from thee, poorer than the poorest of thy servants, banished from thy presence, and yet me "hast thou quickened, who was dead in trespasses and sins."² Surely these former mercies are pledges

¹ Gen. xxxii. 10.

² Eph. ii. 1.

of future; for if, as the apostle says, “while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”³

Again, observe the confidence in the promises of his heavenly Father, manifested in this prayer of Jacob: “Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good.”⁴ It was on this account that Jacob felt convinced that God would do him good; it was enough for him that God had said it; for “God is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent.” This humble but unshaken confidence is the very soul of prayer. Come thus to the throne of grace, pleading the exceeding great and precious promises of your God, and you will never be sent empty away. “Put me in remembrance, (says God,) let us plead together, declare thou that thou mayest be justified.”⁵

³ Rom. v. 10.

⁴ Gen. xxxii. 12.

⁵ Isa. xliii. 26.

Whatever be the blessing that you desire, put the Almighty in remembrance of the promise by which he has ensured it to you. It is his own direction, and therefore cannot be unavailing. Do you require forgiveness? take with you this promise, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."⁶ Do you need protection? remind the Lord that He has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Do you seek acceptance? He has declared, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Happy is it for the Christian, when he can faithfully plead and contentedly repose his soul upon such promises as these, he will have no cause for alarm; the "enemy may come in like a flood, but the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."⁷

There are times, we trust, when many among you pray thus, and for a little season, the glow of devotion and the fire

⁶ Isa. i. 18.

⁷ Isa. lix. 19.

of faith continue ; but, alas ! in most of us, how speedily quenched ; how soon exchanged for the trifling thoughts or vain imaginations suggested by the world around us ! No doubt Jacob participated in this weakness of our fallen nature, for he was a “ man subjected to like passions as we are ; ” ⁸ it was therefore necessary that he should learn the important lesson which our blessed Lord and his disciples have so continually laboured to impress upon us, viz., that “ men ought always to pray and not to faint ; ” ⁹ and observe, how remarkably he was taught it !

Then, continues the inspired historian, “ Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.” ¹ This man, as we learn from the 30th verse, was no less a person than God, called by the prophet Hosea, “ the Angel,” ² “ the Lord of Hosts,” or Je-

⁸ James v. 17.

⁹ Luke xviii. 1.

¹ Gen. xxxii. 24.

² Hosea xii. 4, 5.

hovah, "the messenger of the covenant,"³ the Lord Jesus Christ, who under similar appearances had communed with Adam and Noah, Abraham and Lot. "And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."⁴ "And he blessed him there."⁵

In this most mysterious transaction, however inexplicable may be the fact, the lesson to be imparted is sufficiently obvious. It was to teach Jacob, as the holy men of old were often taught, by act and not by word, that no blessing would God deny to persevering prayer. It is thus that the prophet Hosea explains it when he says, "By his strength, Jacob had power with God; yea, he had

³ Mal. iii. 1.

⁴ Gen. xxxii. 25.

⁵ Gen. xxxii. 29.

power over the angel and prevailed; he wept and made supplication;"⁶ an instance of that holy perseverance by which our Lord assures us, that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."⁷ But lest Jacob should attribute his success to his own strength, "the uncreated angel" who wrestled with him, by a single touch lamed him for life, to convince him that God did not want the power, but the will to conquer him; that God is not constrained by the prayers of his people, but that he in love and mercy, permits faithful, persevering prayer to be omnipotent.

Then did the Almighty reveal to Jacob, by the change of his name, the astonishing nature of the conflict in which he had been engaged. He said, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with GOD and with men, and hast prevailed."⁸

⁶ Hosea xii. 4. ⁷ Matt. xi. 12. ⁸ Gen. xxxii. 28.

My Christian brethren, the time will not allow me to dwell at any length upon the application of this most remarkable incident; but, oh! let it not be disregarded. If Jacob's petitions have suggested matter for prayer, let his wrestling suggest the manner—that prayer must be continued, persevering, and ardent, as well as faithful, humble, and confiding. Meditate upon it in the way of serious self-examination. Inquire whether you know any thing experimentally of this wrestling with God. We admit that it is a highly figurative expression, but if there be meaning in language, it cannot represent the poor, cold, formal services which we too often misname prayer. In the wrestler, every limb, every muscle, every faculty is engaged, and his grasp once taken, he never relaxes his hold, until he has gained the object for which he is struggling. Is there any thing in your holiest efforts at the throne of grace at all resembling this? Yet this is prayer!

That earnest application to the Father of our spirits which engages every feeling and affection of the heart, every thought and faculty of the mind, which, if we may so express ourselves, teaches us to cling around the mercy-seat, and never to relax our hold and rise from our knees without the blessing. Pray thus perseveringly, and you will pray effectually; "when thou shalt call," as the prophet has declared, "the Lord shall answer thee; when thou shalt cry, he shall say, Here I am."⁹ Thus like Jacob shall you have the power with God and shall prevail. Whatever discouragements you may meet with in coming to a throne of grace, be not deterred, remember that on the very spot where God had lamed Jacob, there, even there, he blessed him. Be assured that your greater discouragements are only preludes to greater blessing, that your ever gracious Intercessor is at the present moment as tender, as willing to

⁹ Isaiah lviii. 9.

hear the cry of his children, as in the days of his flesh ; that now, as then, he cannot close his ears or his heart to persevering prayer ; continue, therefore, to intreat him, pray without ceasing, and you will, in his own good time, assuredly receive the wished-for answer, “ Great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” ¹

¹ Matt. xv. 28.

LECTURE V.

GENESIS XXXIII. 4.

"AND ESAU RAN TO MEET HIM, AND EMBRACED HIM,
AND FELL ON HIS NECK, AND KISSED HIM, AND THEY
WEPT."

OUR last discourse brought us to that period in the history of Jacob, in which, after having seen him making every preparation that prudence could dictate against the hostile approach of his brother, we beheld him committing himself, in humble, fervent prayer to the God of his salvation, spreading before the Lord the anxieties and apprehensions which filled his bosom, and engaged, throughout the live long night, in "weeping and making supplication" until he "had power with God, and prevailed." We

are to commence our present observations by endeavouring to trace the effect of this prayer, and to behold the manner in which, in answer to Jacob's petitions, the Almighty averted the threatened calamity. Before we enter upon this investigation, we cannot refrain from endeavouring to strengthen those observations upon prayer which formed a prominent feature of our last discourse, by remarking how powerful an inducement is offered to the prayers of the Christian by the consideration, that the Word of God furnishes us with so many instances of answers to the petitions of his people.¹

God would have acted with equal justice, and man would have been equally without excuse, had the Bible not recorded a single answer to prayer; had the Almighty contented himself with

¹ For a connected view of the answers to prayer, contained in the Scriptures, see a very interesting little work denominated "The Achievements of Prayer."

commanding us to pray, and promising to hear us without revealing to us any particular instances in which the command had been obeyed, and the promise fulfilled. What additional obligations then do the injunctions to prayer possess, since our heavenly Father has in mercy permitted them to be accompanied by so many astonishing instances of accomplishment. Peculiar, indeed, must be the situation of that Christian who cannot look into the pages of God's Word, and find some instances in which his own particular necessity, be it what it may, has been experienced by the saints of old, and been made the subjects of their petitions, and been removed or alleviated in answer to their prayers. My brethren, if you would really allow these instances their due weight in your minds, prayer would acquire an importance and a value of which you have, perhaps, at present but little conception. There is nothing in the Bible to lead you

to imagine that God attended more earnestly to the prayers of the patriarchs, or answered them more readily, than he now answers your own ;—everything to assure you, that “ whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive.”² Whence comes it, then, that, to so many amongst us, prayer appears comparatively to have lost its value? Whence is it, that compared with these men of old, this heartfelt intercourse with our Creator and Redeemer occupies so small a portion of our lives? Is it that we have less sorrow, less necessity, less sin than they had? Is it not rather that we have less faith? We do not believe that God really hears the prayers, and answers the petitions of all who faithfully seek him, and therefore we have no heart for prayer. My brethren, I would appeal to your own consciences whether there be not too much of truth in this. You perhaps consider prayer as a duty, and would

² Matt. xxi. 22.

not, from feelings of obedience towards God, upon any consideration, absolutely neglect it: so far this is well, but it is very different from that true appreciation, that real enjoyment of close and intimate communion with God, which could induce a saint of old to exclaim, "As the hart panteth for the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God! My soul thirsteth for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"³ These are the feelings which can alone render prayer an enjoyment and a delight. Are these then the feelings with which you approach a throne of grace? or does so much of formality and faithlessness mingle with your performance of this great duty, that many a petition is offered, and many a prayer poured forth, without any very deep consideration of the Being you address, or any very heartfelt conviction that you shall obtain that for which you

³ Psalm xlii. 1, 2.

seek? In too many instances, judging from our own hearts, we fear it is so; and the consequence of this is, that prayer is comparatively neglected; it has indeed still its stated hours, or rather its stated moments, in the daily occupation of the Christian, but like some obsolete custom which is not literally banished, but continues to be borne with, rather out of compliment to time and usages that have passed away, and from a kindly feeling towards the habits of our forefathers, than from any peculiar interest which we take in the observance itself; so with too many, the morning and the evening still see them on their knees, still hear the words of prayer passing thoughtlessly from their lips, but the actual intention of the service is overlooked and forgotten. It is no longer the season to which the full heart is looking with anxious delight throughout the busy hours of necessary occupation, as the time when it will be

able to unburden itself into the bosom of a friend ; no longer the season in which, if hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we should rejoice, as ministering to us of "the hidden manna"⁴ and the refreshing streams of "the water of life ;"⁵ but the hour which we almost regret must intervene between our employments and our repose, and which we gladly avail ourselves of every plausible excuse to abbreviate or to omit. The natural consequences of this is, that when we are driven by affliction, or trial, or difficulty, to seek in earnest the throne of grace, we go to God as strangers ; there is a feeling of shyness and awkwardness pervading all our intercourse with heaven, much resembling that which necessarily marks our correspondence with an absent friend, when it has been long intermitted, or our first meeting with a casual acquaintance after long absence. How widely different from these holy

⁴ Rev. ii. 17.⁵ Rev. xxii. 17.

men of old ! They invariably lived at all times near to God, and the natural result was, that no sooner did affliction assail or difficulty oppress them, than they turned for refuge to the mercy-seat, poured forth their complaints with humble confidence into the ear of a father, firmly believing that what they "asked faithfully they should obtain effectually," and they were never disappointed ; they received "help from the sanctuary, and were strengthened out of Zion."⁶ The truth of these assertions, as they refer to yourselves, I leave to the convictions of your own consciences ; as they refer to the holy men of old, the history before us will abundantly verify.

Jacob having passed the night in fervent prayer, and having, by this holy violence, overcome (as we explained in our last) that supernatural visitant who wrestled with him, and obtained on that same spot the blessing, proceeds the fol-

⁶ Psalm xx. 2.

lowing morning on his journey. He knew that the dreaded interview must still take place; that Esau and his four hundred armed men must be encountered: but he no longer trembles for the issue. Before he had thus "cast all his care upon God," we were told that even at the mere mention of Esau's threatened visit he was greatly afraid and distressed;"⁷ now, as the inspired historian relates, "Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men," but not a word of Jacob's fear. The Lord had promised that he should "have power with God and man, and should prevail," and Jacob implicitly believed the promise; he knew not in what manner God would deliver him, and, therefore, he still adopted all the precautionary measures to which we before adverted; but he knew that God would deliver him, and therefore, he no longer dreaded the

⁷ Gen. xxxii. 7.

result. How remarkable is the issue of this long-anticipated trouble! The two bands approach each other. Jacob draws near his brother, still perfectly uncertain of the event, knowing, that at a word from Esau, his predatory followers would put the whole company to the sword, when we are told, "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept." Thus prayer was honoured, the faithfulness of God exemplified, and the life and property of his devout servant rescued from destruction.

How delightful a termination to all Jacob's anxieties and fears! and how much to instruct, to encourage, and to establish the Christian! Who among us cannot sympathize in Jacob's apprehensions and Jacob's deliverance? Have you never, my brethren, beheld at a distance some calamity, or trial, the approach of which was so appalling that you dare not attempt to realize it, and at the same

time so certain that you know it to be inevitable ; and has not your faithless heart almost persuaded you that it was in vain even to pray against it, that it was “hoping against hope,” to expect deliverance ? Surely such instances have occurred to every one of us : and if we have, by the grace of God, been enabled to persevere, how often has the event been mercifully overruled, and the cloud, apparently black with supernatural tempest, has burst in blessings on our heads ! While, alas ! how often has it also happened, that we have given up in hopeless despondency, because we have concluded that the event was certain ; thus limiting the Almighty, and believing, that if he deliver us not in the way which we anticipate, he cannot deliver us at all. Let the example before you “lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.”⁸ Let it convince you that God is never without a refuge for his people.

⁸ Heb. xii. 12.

He may not avert the impending calamity, but he will, in some manner, so ameliorate the circumstances of it, or so influence your own mind to receive it, that when it happens, you will scarcely believe that this was the event to which you had long looked forward with such unqualified apprehension, or such unmitigated repugnancy.

If this be true (and the experience of many who hear me, will, I am sure, verify the declaration) as respects temporal trials or calamities, how much more remarkably is it manifested with regard to spiritual difficulties! Do I, at the present moment, address any who are entering, or desirous of entering, upon the heavenward path; and do they feel such apprehensions of the trials that may await them, that they are almost ready to exclaim with the Psalmist;—"Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me. O, that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest?"

I would remind them, that what the Almighty here performed for Jacob is but the faintest shadow of what he has promised to do for them. We may say to the young Christian, as our Lord said to the Jews, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures;" you are scarcely aware of the superabundance of the promises by which God has pledged himself to help you and to carry you through. Take but one small specimen of them, that the richness of the ore may send you to the mine from which it is dug. "Thus saith the Lord: Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee: yea I will help thee; yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

But do you think that your difficulties are peculiar to yourself, that the obstructions in your path are so vast that you cannot surmount them; hear again the word of the Lord: "Fear not, thou worm

Jacob, and ye men of Israel ; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel. Behold . . . thou shalt thresh the mountains (those very obstructions, which you think impassable, thou shalt not only surmount them, but thresh them), and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them.”⁹ Who can despond when such offers as these are made to each and all? May the Holy Spirit of our God carry them home to those bleeding hearts which need their healing unction, and their quickening power !

The brothers having, by that astonishing, though invisible influence, which the Almighty possesses over the affections and wills of man, been thus reconciled to each other, once more separated upon their journey: Jacob most wisely declining Esau’s kindly intended invitation,

⁹ Isaiah xli. 14—16.

that they should unite their companies and travel together. We say, most wisely declining it, for so essentially different were they in their habits, manners, thoughts, and occupations, that little happiness would have accrued from their intimate association. Esau was, as we have seen, a man of the world, Jacob a man of God; still they were brothers, and as the children of the same parents, it was unquestionably their duty to know and to love, and to be kindly affectioned one towards another; but they were not called upon to live in the closest bonds of intimacy, to travel the same road, and to intermingle in the same company. Jacob was therefore wise in resolutely declining the offer of Esau, and continuing his journey surrounded by the peaceful and domestic blessings with which he had commenced it; refusing even the retinue with which Esau would have honoured him, but which would have ill assorted with the plain and

simple habits of the patriarch. There was a degree of prudence and circumspection in all this, well worthy the consideration of the Christian. You also, my brethren, are commanded by your holy calling to “seek peace and ensue it,”¹ “as much as lieth in you to live peaceably with all men ;”² but you are not commanded to unite companies, and to contract intimacies, and to league yourself closely with any, but with “them who are of the household of faith.”³ “Can two walk together except they be agreed ?”⁴ saith the Lord, and daily experience supplies the answer ; for is it not most wofully demonstrated by the broken friendships, and the unhappy intimacies, and the miserable marriages, which form such prominent, but disgraceful features in every Christian community ? Jacob and Esau might embrace for a few moments, or act affectionately for a passing

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 11.

² Rom. xii. 18.

³ Gal. vi. 10.

⁴ Amos iii. 3.

hour, but if they had attempted to sojourn together, the enmity so early implanted between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, would have infallibly broken forth, and Esau would in all probability once more have hated Jacob, or the spiritually-minded man of God had been drawn from his allegiance by his more worldly-minded brother. The Scripture is full of examples, where the want of such prudence as Jacob manifested, has produced these fatal effects; would that we were enabled to add that such examples are *only* to be found in Scripture; alas! we dare not say, for we cannot think so.

Do we at the present moment speak to none who for want of this Christian circumspection have joined company with those who can but little sympathize in their hopes and joys, their troubles and their fears? Do we address none who have united themselves in friendship, and intimacies, and marriages, with

those from whom, upon all essential points, they widely differ; whose hearts have never been enlightened by the Spirit of God to choose that good part which shall not be taken away from them? There is nothing so dangerous, so entangling to the Christian, and especially to the youthful Christian, as such associations as these, for you cannot but approximate to those in sentiment with whom you closely unite yourself in friendship, and unfortunately in these unnatural alliances there is no reciprocation. The world does not, as you vainly imagine, meet the Christian half way. Its partisans have no sacrifices to make; in uniting themselves to you they have nothing valuable to give up, while you, in uniting yourself to them, yield by degrees every thing most valuable and most dear. Be assured that you cannot take a single step towards their sinful habits, and compliances, and amusements, without taking it in an oppo-

site direction from your Father's house ; that the distance is daily widening, and that the closer you draw to those who know not God, the further you separate yourself, the more you alienate yourself from heaven. You begin by giving up only what you consider the non-essentials of religion, from an amiable desire of conciliating the good-will, or perhaps of being useful to those with whom you associate ; but as you advance, you discover that every cession on your part only leads to higher demands, and more exorbitant requests on theirs ; from partaking with them, at first, of what is merely indifferent, or perhaps in itself innocent, you are led on to those things which are inexpedient, and will probably end in what is absolutely guilty. This is, alas ! no imaginary danger ; for may we not say, to some among you—look back through the vista of a few months or years, from the spot on which you at present stand, and mark how rapid has

been the change in your feelings and conduct! You are scarcely able to recognise your former selves. Where are now those feelings so tremblingly alive to the honour and glory of God, those anxieties to "redeem the time because the days are evil,"⁵ once so prevalent in your bosom? Where are those desires to benefit the souls of all with whom you converse? that almost instinctive dread even of the smallest deviation from the ways of godliness, which made the least sin such an abhorrence to your soul, that its committal would fill your eyes with tears, and bring watchfulness and wakefulness to your couch? How few of these feelings have survived? scarcely a vestige of them remaining; and yet you have not at present, perhaps, been led into gross sins, you have not sunk into the depth of enormities. Whence, then, has come this imperceptibly advancing change? It is the natural effect of your

⁵ Ephes. v. 16.

intimacy with those who make a mock at sin, who think all religion of the heart superstition and enthusiasm. It is the predicted result of "the friendship of the world,"⁶ which the Bible has declared is "enmity with God." It is the fatal consequence which the infallible word of the Lord has proclaimed: "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."⁷ These are the reasons for your present state of indifference to subjects once so dear to you. Would to God it were as easy to apply the remedy as to recount the reasons! Yet should we ill perform our duty as Christian ministers, as those who have the charge over you in the Lord—if we did not suggest the remedy—if we did not say to all such, there is but one method of escape: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."⁸ You must, however painful be the effort,

⁶ James iv. 4.

⁷ 1 Tim. v. 6.

⁸ Ephes. v. 6.

arouse yourself, and turn, and retrace your steps, and flee, as for your life. There is no other remedy; you cannot journey with the gay and splendid retinue of Esau, and yet expect to be partakers of the rest of Jacob; therefore, hear ye the words of the Lord: and may He who possesses the residue of the Spirit, apply them with efficacy to your souls. “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly.”⁹ “I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no not to eat.”¹ “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for, what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness; and what communion hath light with darkness? Wherefore, come out from among

⁹ 2 Thess. iii. 6.¹ 1 Cor. v. 11.

them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you!"² Here is your remedy; the only remedy which the word of God can offer you; until you plainly evince, by your conduct, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord;" and resolve with David, that you "will not know" (in the habits of intimacy) "a wicked person,"³ you cannot be preparing for the society of those "who are redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God, and to the Lamb,"⁴ and who "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

Happy would it have been for Jacob, had he, upon all occasions, manifested the same degree of prudence and circumspection, as in the incident to which we have been referring: but, as years pass on, there is much to distress and harass him in his children's conduct, and not a little to humble him in his own.

² 2 Cor. vi. 14, 17. ³ Ps. ci. 4. ⁴ Rev. xiv. 4.

We find him, at the opening of the 35th chapter, still lingering in the country of the Shechemites, although the crying sins of his family, too little restrained, as it appears, by the parental authority of Jacob, had made him an object of hatred to the people among whom he dwelt. His worldly affairs had now been blessed with a long season of prosperity; and what was the consequence? Had success brought him nearer to God? Had he, whom we beheld in the day of affliction coming so fervently, and so constantly to the throne of grace, been as constant and as fervent in his applications there during the sunshine of prosperity? We fear we cannot answer in the affirmative. Worldly ease and temporal enjoyment had produced that effect upon Jacob, which they frequently, we had almost said invariably, produce upon ourselves; they had rendered him less mindful of the Lord God of his salvation. You will recollect, that when Jacob left

his father's house, a destitute and solitary wanderer, the Almighty manifested to him upon the first night of his journey, assurances of protection, in the remarkable vision of the ladder; and you will doubtless remember, that on that solemn occasion, Jacob had vowed that if God would be with him, and only give him bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and bring him back in peace, he would there erect an altar, and dedicate the tenth part of all that he possessed to God. Let us now inquire in what manner this vow had been performed. Twenty years had elapsed, and the Almighty had most bountifully fulfilled his portion of the covenant. He had indeed been with Jacob, never for a moment deserting him; he had brought him back in peace; he had given him not merely bread and raiment, but made him rich, and increased in goods; and he who with his staff only had passed over Jordan, had now become a prince and a potentate; where, then,

was Jacob's portion of the covenant? where was his vow? To the disgrace of our fallen nature, unfulfilled and forgotten! But God is not to be thus trifled with with impunity. "God is not mocked."⁵ He therefore speaks to Jacob not as heretofore, in words of kindness, but in deeds of chastening. He endeavours to remind him by the severe memento of family affliction. The ruin of his only daughter, and the iniquitous and disgraceful conduct of two of his sons, are the methods by which the Almighty first knocks at the heart of Jacob. The sleep of prosperity is, however, too secure for this to be effectual. How, then, does the Almighty proceed? Does he punish more severely? does he plant some sharper thorn in the bosom of his forgetful servant? Man would assuredly have acted thus; but how delightful is it to trace, in all the ways, and in all the works of God, the infinite superiority of the Creator to the creature.

⁵ Gal. vi. 7.

My brethren, God has declared that punishment is his "strange work;"⁶ a work in which he never engages, until our sins become clamorous for vengeance. In the instance before us, therefore, instead of proceeding to greater extremities, God in justice remembers mercy; having, in justice, punished, he now delights himself, by returning in mercy, to spare, and condescends in person to remind Jacob of his neglected vow: "And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother."⁷ How mild, and how affecting an expostulation! the Almighty reminds Jacob, not so much of the neglect of the servant, as of the mercy of the master. He does not say, build an altar unto the God whom thou hast promised, and hast disappointed, but unto the "God who appeared unto thee, when

⁶ Isa. xxviii. 21.

⁷ Gen. xxxv. 1.

thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." There must have been something peculiarly touching in the recollection which was awakened by these words: When thou fleddest from an enemy, and that enemy a brother, I appeared for thee; I was thy refuge. Blessed be God, there is then "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."⁸ Where is the heart that could have withstood such an expostulation? Certainly not in the bosom of any real child of God; Jacob was instantly recalled by it to his allegiance and his duty, and proceeded to make preparations for the accomplishment of his vow.

Our review of these must, however, be deferred until the next discourse; but we cannot omit the application which this instance of the Almighty's method of dealing with his servants so strikingly suggests.

There may be some among you standing at the present hour in the sight of God, in a precisely similar situation to

⁸ Prov. xviii. 24.

that of Jacob; you also have voluntarily been made the subjects of a most solemn and important vow, which you have, at least in most instances, thoughtfully and premeditatedly acknowledged before God. The terms of that vow are neither ambiguous nor obscure. You have pledged yourself to "renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil," and to "continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto your life's end." My brethren, I would most affectionately urge you to the inquiry, How am I fulfilling this vow? Is it continually present to my mind, that I am bound by an obligation of such infinite importance? When tempted by my own heart, or by my spiritual enemies, is this the tendency of my reply, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"⁹ I who have dedicated myself to his holy service by so solemn a covenant. Or, like Jacob, have years of prosperity and happiness rendered you utterly for-

⁹ Gen. xxxix. 9.

getful of your promises? If it be so, we tremble for the consequences. You have seen that God is not mocked: what we have vowed, God will see that we pay, or will in anger and in judgment visit the neglect of it. He has himself said, "Pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay."¹ If you are a child of God, He will not suffer this forgetfulness to continue; He will remind you, perhaps, as He reminded Jacob, by some severe domestic calamity—by cutting off some creature idol, or some creature comfort, that though many years may have passed away, and the very tenor of your vow may be almost forgotten by yourself, it is as fresh in the memory of God, as if you were now pledging yourself before his mercy-seat; for with Him "a thousand years are but as yesterday." Oh! do not compel the Almighty to have re-

¹ Eccles. v. 4, 5.

course to his "strange work;" in a single moment he can strike a blow, the effects of which would carry you, with a wounded spirit and a broken heart, through a course of lingering wretchedness to a premature grave. And after this, there is more that he can do; "God is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."² Be warned, then, we earnestly beseech you; remember your vow, your baptismal vow; "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works;"³ the sceptre of mercy is still extended; wait not until it be exchanged for the rod of judgment. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the right way, if his wrath be kindled, yea but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."⁴

² Matt. x. 28. ³ Rev. ii. 5. ⁴ Psalm ii. 12.

LECTURE VI.

GENESIS xxxv. 2.

"THEN JACOB SAID UNTO HIS HOUSEHOLD, AND TO ALL THAT WERE WITH HIM, PUT AWAY THE STRANGE GODS THAT ARE AMONG YOU, AND BE CLEAN, AND CHANGE YOUR GARMENTS."

Our last Lecture concluded with the very striking remonstrance from the Almighty to Jacob, which precedes the words of the text, and was intended to remind him of his forgotten vow, and to urge upon him the accomplishment of his neglected promise. Jacob, as we have seen, had long lived in sad forgetfulness of those peculiar mercies of God, which he had pledged himself to commemorate. He had too long resided in the immediate vicinity of persons who knew not God, and deeply had he suffered in his family

by this approximation. For he had lived to behold his children guilty of sins, at the bare recital of which, humanity shudders: but Jacob was a man of God: and though on some occasions, certainly deficient in the proper exercise of parental authority, so acutely did he feel the guilt of his children, so sensible was he of their alienation from God, that we find him, in the text, making every endeavour which a godly parent could make to reform them, and even in the closing scene of his life, thus strongly reprobating their unholy conduct:—"O my soul! come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united;" "cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel."¹

There are few things which plant so sharp a thorn in the heart of a parent, and more especially of a Christian parent, as the knowledge that his children are

¹ Genesis xlix. 6, 7.

not walking in the way of God's commandments, that their hearts are not right with God. But there is a circumstance which can even sharpen that thorn, and add poignancy to the wounds which it inflicts, viz., the conviction in the mind of the parent that every effort has not been made, every prayer been offered, every example set before his children, which might, instrumentally, have won them to the love of God, and to the paths of holiness. This it is which causes the thorn to rankle; and from this we fear that Jacob's bosom was not entirely free. Had he not permitted his daughter to mingle unnecessarily with the daughters of the unbelievers, (in the words of the historian,) "to go out to see the daughters of the land,"² he had not lamented her ruin. Had he not, at that critical period, "held his peace,"³ and committed the management of his family too much to the ungovern-

² Gen. xxxiv. 1.³ Gen. xxxiv. 5.

able passions of his sons, he had not been made thus wretched by their enormities.

How few are the sufferings of ourselves, or of our families, which we may not trace to our own infirmities or sins! What an additional motive for a charitable view of the conduct of those around us, and for carefully scrutinizing our own! Christian parents, examine seriously and conscientiously, how much of the present worldliness and frivolity, and even sinfulness of your children, is attributable to yourselves. How much of guilt to them, and of anguish to you, might have been escaped, had you early, consistently, and prayerfully educated them according to the privileges and the duties of their baptismal covenant, in a sincere renunciation of "the world, the flesh, and the devil?" The promises of God that this would not have been ineffectual, are most ample and most encouraging: for has he not expressly declared to his people, "I will pour my

Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as willows by the watercourses. One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel."⁴ How beautiful a picture of a whole family converted to the true and saving knowledge of the Redeemer, each in turn admitted as the lambs into the fold of the good Shepherd, and rising up to call him blessed. How cheering a prospect for parents who are adopting in faith the means which God has put into their power! Do not, however, let us be misunderstood; as if the conversion of the children's souls were in the hands of the parents, and must infallibly be attached to the use of any, or of all the means which they can adopt; it is essentially the work of God's free Spirit,

⁴ Isa. xliv. 3, 4, 5.

who will do it as He pleases, and when He pleases. Those are among the secret “things which belong to the Lord our God,”⁵ known only to Himself, and disposed of only by His sovereign will: it is enough, that if you desire the blessing, you must be found as earnest in the pursuit of it, and in the use of the means, as if they could command it; but then you must trust implicitly to God’s grace, to bestow it as a free, unmerited gift. Remember for your comfort, it is only for our failure in what is possible, that we shall be punished, not for our failure in that which, to all but God himself, is impossible; the heaviest judgment with which in holy writ a godly parent was ever visited, was not because he had not made his sons the pious and devoted followers of that almighty Being who he himself delighted to obey, but simply because “his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.”⁶ This, most as-

⁵ Deut. xxix. 29.

⁶ 1 Sam. iii. 13.

surely, Eli might have done ; this, in all probability, Jacob might have done ; and we fear that you will find it difficult to deny, before that God who seeth the heart, that this you also might have done. Oh ! that every Christian parent would lay this seriously to heart ; and if I now address any of you who are conscious that, with Jacob, you have erred in this essential point of your duty, may the example of Jacob which we are about to review, be blessed by the Holy Spirit of God to your edification and improvement ; and while a merciful God forgives for his dear Son's sake your past derelictions, may you be the more earnest in endeavouring to exercise your parental authority in the service of the King of kings.

No sooner had God recalled to Jacob's mind his promises and his vow, than we find the patriarch anxious for the sanctification of all connected with him, before he presumed to go up with them to Bethel, the house of God. We are told, "Then

Jacob said to his household, and all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments.”⁷ This was acting faithfully and conscientiously towards all the members of his numerous family; but who would have believed that such a command could have been needed? That in Jacob’s household there should have been strange gods to be put away? That he, whose life had been a life of mercies, and of such intimate communion with the true God, should have been induced to countenance idolatry and ungodliness in his tents: that his dependants, his children, and as we are told in another place, even Rachel, the favourite wife of his bosom, should have thus fearfully transgressed, and, still more grievous that this is the first time in which we have heard the voice of Jacob raised steadily and firmly against it? Probably the patriarch partook so largely of the in-

⁷ Gen. xxxv. 2.

firmities of our fallen nature, that he dared not, even though the honour of God was at stake, risk the anger or discontent of those who were dear to him ; perhaps, had such an interference been urged upon him by any thing short of a divine command, he would have replied, that it would be not only painful, but hopeless to interfere ; that his words would not be heeded, that his household had gone too widely astray from God to be recalled by the voice of man. Christian brethren, is not this the fallacious manner in which you yourselves continually reason ? You behold conduct in those closely related to you, or immediately connected with you, aye, the very members of your own household, which, as servants of God, you cannot approve, because you know that your Master cannot approve it. You mark the risings of pride, or of vanity, or of display ; you see, perhaps, the younger members of your families worshipping those strange deities of pleasure, of folly,

and of worldliness ; the elder branches bowing the knee to the golden idols of wealth and human applause, and you have refrained from expostulating with them upon their danger and their guilt ; you have never yet said honestly or fearlessly to them, You are upon the broad road and the beaten way which lead to destruction ; all your labours are for time. Eternity, vast, boundless eternity, does not enter into your calculations, and yet you stand upon its verge every day and every hour.

If these members of your household perish, if they be cut off in unrepented sin, or snatched away in the midst of a course of worldly folly, how will you answer it at the great day of account ? If you beheld a fellow-creature perishing for lack of food, would you not endeavour to supply it ? If you saw him sinking beneath the waters, would you not hold out a helping hand ? How then can you justify your indifference, when

it is not the body but the soul that is perilled ; not time, but eternity, which is at stake ? Perhaps you witness not these sins in your household—all is orderly—all is outwardly correct—it is even what is called a religious family ; but then, alas ! its members are content with a nominal religion, cold, heartless, and un-influential, in which the outward form is substituted for the spiritual grace ; no real turning of the heart to God ; no fervent love to the Saviour ; no anxious desire of approving themselves to him in all the daily transactions of life. This false and formal religion is among “the strange gods” of the days in which we live ; and can you calmly suffer those who are dear to you thus to worship an unknown God ? can you, in silence, behold them mistaking the form for the reality, and “building themselves up,” not “on our most holy faith,”⁸ but in self-righteousness, and spiritual ignorance,

⁸ Jude 20.

and self-delusion ; and do they hear no warning word from you ! Have you never told them that these are gods which cannot save ? Have you never urged them to look into the deep corruption of their own hearts and to know themselves ? Have you never dwelt upon their absolute need of a better righteousness than their own to justify them before God, “ even the righteousness which is of God by the faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe ; ”⁹ and earnestly entreated them to go to the “ fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,” to which you yourself have delighted to resort, where you have found healing for your guilt, and peace for your soul ? Have you not, in short, as Jacob did, affectionately urged them : “ Put away your strange gods,”¹ wash you, make you clean ? Oh ! if your hearts were really filled with the love of God and of our Saviour Jesus

⁹ Rom. iii. 22.

¹ Gen. xxx. 2.

Christ, there would be no need of these inquiries; the difficulty would not be to speak of Him, but to refrain from speaking of Him to all around you; "like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garment;" so would be the unction with which you would delight to dwell upon heaven and heavenly things, the duties and the promises of the gospel, in all your intercourse with men, from your dearest friend to your lowest dependant.

Proceed we now to mark what was the effect, in Jacob's case, of his faithful expostulation. Did his family resist the command? were his words spoken in vain? So far from it, that the very verse which follows, assures us, that immediately upon his bidding, without a single exception, a single denial, "they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hands, and all the earrings

² Psalm cxxxiii. 2.

which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem."³ Such is continually the manner in which a duty, difficult and hopeless in the prospect, is rendered easy and successful, the moment we have sufficient faith to attempt to carry it into execution. Such, we firmly believe, would be the result of an honest declaration upon these important points, in an infinitely greater number of instances, than even the most faithful Christian anticipates; and we cannot doubt that we shall hereafter behold many among the redeemed of the Lord, who might have been "our joy and crown of rejoicing,"⁴ had we been more faithful to them, or more industrious in the work of God, placed as jewels in the crown of some brother Christian, who dared to speak when we were silent, or to labour when we were slothful and indifferent. For be assured, brethren, that where expos-

³ Gen. xxxv. 4.⁴ 1 Thess. ii. 20.

tulation is offered in a truly Christian spirit, and where the life and temper of the speaker are not widely at variance with it, men do listen, and listen willingly, much more frequently than we imagine; and, although no instantaneous effect be produced, some arrow may be fixed in the conscience which is never afterwards extracted; some seeds sown in the memory, which may lie dormant for years, but at last "take root downwards and bear fruit upwards," when "the sower who went forth to sow" that seed, has long since finished his work, and been called to his reward. Surely, if you consider this, and reflect upon the unspeakable blessedness of being instrumental in converting but one sinner from the error of his ways,⁵ or bringing one soul nearer to its God, you will deeply regret the many opportunities you have already lost, and anxiously avail yourself of the smallest opening for future useful-

⁵ See Dan. xii. 3.

ness to which the finger of God shall point you. It is when our lips are closed by sickness, or our labours in the service of our divine Master unexpectedly suspended by the inscrutable will of our heavenly Father, that, for the first time, we rightly estimate the gracious privilege of having ever been permitted to "put our hand to the plough," in this great and glorious work; then, indeed, we only regret that while health and strength were bestowed upon us, we were not more willing "to spend and be spent"⁶ for God: that we did not give greater diligence in the work of our high calling; that we were not more "instant in season and out of season," affectionately urging these great truths upon the hearts of all with whom we had to do.

Very encouraging is it to observe the manner in which, after Jacob had purified his household and performed his promised vow, the Lord appeared unto

⁶ 2 Cor. xii. 15.

him, and not only confirmed the change of his name, but repeated to him the blessed assurances of his temporal and spiritual greatness. Perhaps, with the exception of the closing scene of Jacob's life, this was the season of his greatest happiness; his family and his household brought in apparent sincerity to the worship of the true God, the greatest blessing, next to the conversion of his own soul, which the servant of God can enjoy. In addition to this, every comfort that worldly prosperity could offer, was possessed by him. Every joy that the anticipation of the future could bestow, was ensured to him; there was nothing left for him to desire. Alas! how closely connected, in this vale of tears, are our sorrows and our joys. Bethel beheld Jacob at the summit of worldly happiness. Bethlehem, the next town through which he passes on his return, sees him in the very depths of affliction, a sorrowing widower! Rachel, his beloved partner, is

taken from him in a moment! and peculiarly distressing to his feelings, while giving birth to a second son. Her passionate exclamation had been, "Give me children, or else I die."⁷ Her prayer was heard, the children given, but her life was the forfeit of her undue anxiety. When shall we learn that it is God alone who really knows what is best for his people, and that, in all temporal affairs, the safest path for the Christian is to put a blank into the hands of his heavenly Father, that He may write in it what He will, while we are content to say from the heart, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." Here alone is our safety and our comfort: "Sweet to lie passive in God's hands, and know no will but his."

While the soul of Rachel was departing, her attendants endeavoured to cheer her, saying, "Fear not, thou shalt have this son also." But, like the wife of

⁷ Gen. xxx. 1.

Phinehas, "she answered not, neither did she regard it."^a Life was too quickly ebbing to permit her to rejoice even in the acquisition she had so long and so ardently desired. Weak and miserable are the comforters of the world, when they endeavour to gladden the chamber of sickness, or the bed of death, by promises of worldly blessings, or the recollection of worldly advantages. Of what avail was it to the dying mother to be told, that she should leave behind her another little one to be tempest-tossed upon that ocean from which she was so fast receding? Of what avail is any thing that worldly friendship can suggest at such an hour? "Fear not:" the language of Rachel's friends is, indeed, the universal language at these seasons of terror and dismay; and too often the injunction, not of holy confidence, but of ignorance or presumption. For is there no rational ground of fear? Is it nothing, that we are about to

^a 1 Sam. iv. 20.

suffer that wrench which separates the body and the soul, that have been so long and such intimate companions? Is it nothing, that we are about to put off this mortal clothing, and stand before the judgment-seat of Him, "to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid?" Are not these things fitting objects of fear? Who is there, carrying about with him a body of sin and death, who will deny it? To the worldling, this must be indeed a fearful, as to the disciple of our Lord, it must still be a most solemn hour. But blessed, for ever-blessed be our Redeemer! He came "to deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage."⁹ He came, not only to draw the sting of death, but to remove the fear. We may now in safety adopt the language of Rachel's friends, and say to every true believer among you, Do you fear death? "Fear not."

⁹ Heb. ii. 15.

That Saviour to whose holy keeping, you have committed your soul, has said, "I will redeem thee from death; O death, I will be thy plague."¹ Do you fear the grave? "Fear not;" the same Saviour has said, "O grave, I will be thy destruction." It is no longer the impure and tainted sepulchre, but the bed perfumed by the body of Him who once himself lay there. The way to it is no longer a dark and untrodden passage, for the Lamb is the light thereof, and the print of his footstep is visible throughout all its dreary windings. Do you fear the resurrection? "Fear not:" it is no more a vague uncertainty; for the unerring word of God has revealed, "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."² Do you fear the descent of "the great white throne,"³ of

¹ Hosea xiii. 14. ² Rom. viii. 11. ³ Rev. xx. 11.

which God's word has told us? "Fear not:" the Judge who sits upon it is that dear and precious Saviour, "whom having not seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."⁴ Do you fear the eternity which shall succeed? "Fear not:" it will not be too long for the enjoyment of the "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven"⁵ for the redeemed of the Lord, and to be employed in his service, and to his glory.

⁴ 1 Pet. i. 8, 9.

⁵ 1 Pet. i. 4.

LECTURE VII.

GENESIS XLV. part of 26th verse.

**"AND JACOB'S HEART FAINTED, FOR HE BELIEVED
THEM NOT."**

THE chapter with which our observations commenced this morning, viz., the 37th, opens thus: "And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger;" in the land of Canaan. There is a peculiar emphasis in these words: "Jacob dwelt," as a resident in the land. Isaac had been content to be a stranger there. Jacob had become great, and wealthy, and powerful, and was no longer willing, as his father and his grandfather had been, "to sojourn," so the Apostle to the Hebrews expresses it, "in the land of promise, as

in a strange country ;”¹ one of the brightest evidences of their faith in God, and of their anxious expectations of that “city which hath foundations.” But Jacob was beginning to settle himself in Canaan, not as his temporary resting-place, but his abiding home. This is precisely the state of mind which the god of this world is always desirous of inducing : if he can but succeed in tempting you to forget that this is not your rest ; if he can but encourage you to throw all your heart, and energies, and affections, into the pleasures of business of this transitory scene ; the “planting, and building, and marrying, and giving in marriage ;” “the sitting down to work, and the rising up only to play,”² of this temporary state of existence, his end is gained. Heaven is neglected ; Christ is despised ; God is forgotten ; the soul sleeps—and who will venture to say that it shall awaken until the last

¹ Hebrews xi. 9, 16.

² 1 Cor. x. 7.

trump of the Archangel proclaim the irrevocable doom—"Woe, woe unto you, for ye have received your consolation."³

But blessed be the God of Jacob, this is a state from which He is continually, aye, daily, recalling his children. If the tree bear no fruit, does the careful husbandman give it up in despair? O no; he prunes it; he digs about it; he loosens the ground about its roots, to let in the refreshing shower and the invigorating sunshine. Thus also does the great Husbandman, when he beholds his children settling down in fruitless forgetfulness; He brings upon them some afflictive visitation, or some awakening providence, or, by what we term some accidental change of circumstances, He uproots them from the place in which they have long lived peaceably and at ease, and thus says aloud to the ear and the heart, "Arise and depart, for this is not your rest."⁴ That such is assuredly the Almighty's

³ Luke vi. 24.

⁴ Micah ii. 10.

method with his people, the experience of many among us will abundantly testify. But it is one of those important truths which do not depend merely on personal experience for their acceptance; it is a matter of express revelation in God's holy word. Thus saith the Lord, "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel; therefore his taste remaineth in him, and his scent is not changed."^b How accurate a description of one, whose roots the Lord hath never shaken by affliction, or adversity, or change, and whose natural taste and feelings remain unaltered! Observe how the prophet proceeds: "Therefore, behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send unto him wanderers that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and shall break their bottles." So was it with Jacob; he had "settled upon his lees," and he was dwelling in

^b Jeremiah xlviii. 11.

the land in which he ought to have felt himself only a passing stranger.

My Christian brethren, if I address any who are falling into this too common and too dangerous a mistake ; any of you upon whom the world has smiled, and whom a long series of prosperous events, a course of uninterrupted health, or of domestic happiness, have tempted to establish yourself in false security here below, be timely warned by the dealings of the Almighty with the patriarch, how he will also deal with you. He will no more permit his children thus to sleep away their souls, than, as we have seen from former incidents in Jacob's life, He will permit them, unchecked, to sin them away. Our Lord has himself declared that He "stands at the door and knocks"⁶ by his ministers, by his Spirit, by his providences ; and be assured, that if you are a child of his, He will not cease to knock ; every stroke will be louder and harsher, and more appal-

⁶ Rev. iii. 20.

ling, until He has roused you from your lethargy, until you have opened to Him your whole heart, and received Him as your full and sufficient Saviour. Do not, then, content yourself with a land in which the real people of God have always rejoiced to account themselves as strangers. Do not be in love with a world which is at enmity with God ; but as the Psalmist says, " Delight thyself in the Lord," He alone can give, " and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Proceed we now to mark how God, in mercy, was about to exemplify this, in his treatment of the patriarch ; to break the cisterns which Jacob had hewn out for himself, but which could hold no water ; to empty the earthen vessels in which his soul delighted ; and, in this last stage of his pilgrimage, to compel him to wander into a strange country, and to finish his days in a foreign land.

The instructive and well-known history of Joseph forms the comment upon this

observation ; and how dexterously does the inspired historian prepare us for the event even by the opening passage of that history—"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children."⁷ Whenever the Almighty needs a rod to chasten us, our own passions and affections, our own preferences and partialities, have always one at hand to offer him. God was about to call Israel to remembrance ; a gentle blow would have been unavailing ; it was to be given with a tender hand : but it must be sharp, that it may be acutely felt ; and heavy, that it may be long remembered. The Almighty does not take away Levi, or Judah, or Zebulun, the sons of the little-regarded Leah, but Joseph, the son of the tenderly-beloved Rachael ! her first-begotten son ; him whom Jacob loved more than all his children. How often in the lives of God's people is this great lesson taught us, to be most jealous over the affection which

⁷ Gen. xxxvii. 3.

we bestow upon created beings. It is to God alone, as revealed to you in the person of his dear Son, that your whole heart, and soul, and strength, may go out in the exercises of gratitude and love without excess, and without sin ; it is Him alone that you may love without measure and without reserve ; for he has promised, that the more you love Him, the more you shall be loved of his Father ; the more He himself will love you, and the more clearly, the more perfectly He will manifest himself to you. You cannot be too often cautioned, to permit none to divide with God the sovereignty of your heart ; be it a wife, a husband, a child, a parent, or a friend, whom it delights you to array in every fancied excellency, and then to worship the work which your own hands have made, be assured you are but adorning the victim for the sacrifice, and accelerating the blow from which your soul would shrink. You are, perhaps, withdrawing, day by day, from

God, all the highest feelings and affections of your bosom, and are fondly hanging them around the earthly object of your love ; but are you aware of what you are doing ? do you at all anticipate the inevitable result ? You are merely erecting a mark, at which the unerring shaft shall be pointed, and when the bow of God's vengeance, or it may be of his love—for He strikes in mercy, and wounds only to heal—when that bow of God shall be bent, the first and sharpest arrow from the quiver will be pointed at the mark which you yourself have set up, and your idol will infallibly be levelled in the dust. All that remained to Jacob of his once too dearly-beloved Joseph, was “the coat of many colours,” the sad memorial of his unjust partiality ; all that will remain to you to sooth the pangs of memory, will be the recollection of the departed, embittered by the remembrance of your own guilty preference for the creature above the Creator.

Years passed away, and while Jacob was thus refining in the furnace of affliction, many vicissitudes of light and shadow were falling upon his path, and the Almighty was preparing for him a place of peaceful repose in which to close the years of his pilgrimage ; at the very time that Jacob was mourning the loss of Joseph, and refusing to be comforted, God was with this same Joseph, elevating him by steps the most remarkable and improbable, from a dungeon to a throne, and placing him in the "second chariot"^s of the land of Egypt. It was then that those deeply interesting scenes took place with which we have all, from our childhood, been acquainted, and which have so often excited our early commiseration, and bade our infant sorrows flow. For who is there among us, upon whose memory those scenes have not been indelibly impressed. Who has not delighted to trace the ascending path of the

^s Gen. xli. 43.

virtuous and godly Joseph, and to behold him rising, whether in a prison or a court, to the most confidential employments and the highest offices, because he feared God, and walked in his ways? Who has not traced with deepening interest every passage of that instructive tale, the famine in Canaan, driving Joseph's brethren into Egypt to fulfil unwittingly his dream, and to bow themselves down before his footstool? The money and the silver cup discovered in the mouth of their sacks; their conscience-stricken exclamation, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear, therefore is this distress come upon us!"⁹ And who has not wept over the bereavements of the patriarch, when exclaiming, in all the wretchedness of utter desolation, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against

⁹ Gen. xlii. 21.

me !”¹ Our limits forbid us to dwell upon scenes so familiar to our hearts as these : but how can we pass over without a comment, the faithless repinings of Jacob, “all these things are against me !” Had he followed the Lord for an hundred and thirty years, and lived upon the richest bounties of his providence and grace, and did he really believe at last that any dispensation of the Almighty could be against him ? Well might the Psalmist say, “Lord ! what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou soregardest him ?” Surely, nothing but infinite condescension and infinite love could have ever borne with such faithlessness and ingratitude. In all this trying visitation which so depressed the patriarch, there was not literally a single circumstance which the Almighty was not overruling for good. To us, my brethren, to whom all is now disclosed, this is indeed perfectly evident ; we can easily demon-

¹ Gen. xlii. 36.

strate, that every subject which Jacob selected as a matter for repining, was in reality a source of thanksgiving and rejoicing. Hear only the words of his lamentation, and how easily they are refuted. "Joseph is not," says the desponding patriarch. We might reply, because God has removed him for a short time from your family, to enable him by his advancement to provide against the famine by which you would otherwise have inevitably perished. But "Simeon is not"—he has remained in Egypt, a comfortable inmate in his brother's house. But "they will take Benjamin away!" yes, to hasten the declaration which is to comfort your widowed heart, and to bring your long-lost son once more to your bosom. We acknowledge that Jacob could not have known that these things were so, but then he also could not have known the contrary; and if faith had had her perfect work, that "faith which is the substance of things hoped for,

the evidence of things not seen,"² he would not have viewed only the dark side of the picture, he would have reasoned as he had before done when his faith was in fuller exercise, that because God had blessed him, God assuredly would bless him, and he would not, while in the hands of a merciful God, have so despairingly exclaimed, "All these things are against me!"

My Christian brethren, can we thus animadvert upon the conduct of the patriarch, without hearing the still small voice of conscience whispering to ourselves, "Thou art the man?" This has been thine own failing, and thine own sin. Whose heart does not plead guilty to the charge? who has not in the first hours of affliction felt, and spoken, and acted, as if all were lost, as if hope itself were fled, as if "God had forgotten to be gracious, and shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure?"³ If some bright

² Heb. xi. 1.

³ Psalm lxxvii. 9.

seraph from the world above had stood by us in these our moments of trouble, or of sorrow, or of despondency, one of those perfect beings whose angel eyes can view the whole of the dispensations of which we are permitted for the present only to see the dark and cheerless commencement, how might he have convicted us, as we have convicted Jacob; how might he have convinced us that not a single friend, or comfort, or blessing "is not," unless the removal minister in some certain measure to our eternal benefit; that while we are saying, "All these things are against us," he would know that they were all working together for good; that though "Joseph be not, and Simeon be not, and Benjamin be taken away," not one blow has been struck, not one privation has been inflicted, not one inroad upon our happiness has been made which mercy could have spared, or which could have been withheld without imparting real, lasting injury to our

immortal souls. Learn then to trust God, even when you are unable to trace Him ; and if the dispensation be so dark that no ray of love, no gleam of mercy, appear to penetrate it ; if blow follow blow in quick and fearful succession, and one blessing after another be removed, and one hope after another wither, be assured that what “ thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter,”⁴ and instead of saying with the desponding Jacob, “ All these things are against me,” say with the confiding Job, “ Though he slay me, yet will I trust him ;”⁵ and let the winds of adversity, the more bleakly and coldly they blow, only drive you the closer to that bosom, where every child of God finds shelter and support.

Time would fail me were I to tell of all the minute and interesting details which issued in Joseph’s acknowledgment of himself, his pardon of his repentant brethren, and his affectionate message to

⁴ John xiii. 7.

⁵ Job xiii. 15.

his aged parent. It is of more importance to ourselves, and more intimately connected with the biography we are prosecuting, to observe the patriarch's conduct at the joyful termination of his long and grievous trial. We read, then, that his sons "went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan, unto Jacob their father, and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt; and Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not."⁶ How beautiful and how touching a picture! Yet even here, how do the infirmities of our nature manifest themselves! The intelligence is now too good to be true. Jacob's heart fainted, and he could not believe it. He had never hesitated to believe when the intelligence was most heart-rending and afflicting: when all things were against him, he was ready and willing to believe all, nay more than all, that could be told him. He did not

⁶ Gen. xlv. 25, 26.

for a moment doubt the severity of God ; he reserved these misgivings only for the mercies of his heavenly Father. How accurate a picture of the operations of the human mind in higher things ; so ready to receive all the darker shades with which men portray the features of the Almighty. So “slow of heart to believe” even his own declarations when they speak only of tenderness, forgiveness, and love. How often do we behold this manifested upon a bed of sickness, or in the chambers of death ! nay, is it not sometimes visible in the very temple in which we are now assembled, and among yourselves ? When we, the ministers of Christ, come to you in the name of our Divine Master, and desire to present you with the freest and the richest offers of his Gospel ; when we endeavour to approach you, “as though God did beseech you by us,” to be reconciled to him ; when we strive to tell you, what no tongue can worthily tell, of

the unsearchable riches of Christ, of the free and full and finished salvation which he has worked out for you, and earnestly entreat you to "receive the atonement,"⁷ to accept the free and proffered gifts, and to enter at once into fellowship with the divine and affectionate Giver, that your sins may be forgiven, your incapacibilities removed, your inheritance secured, that you may thus go on your way rejoicing, what is the feeling with which you too often hear us? Is it not with this which Jacob manifested? There is a degree of distrust lingering in your bosom. It cannot be that the way of salvation is so simple! That the love of God in Christ Jesus is so abundant! It would be presumptuous in me to apply such offers to myself! Is it not thus that your hearts faint through unbelief? Christian brethren, be assured, that even under this, its most plausible aspect, even when thus disguised in the garment of

⁷ Rom. v. 11.

humility, unbelief can never be gratifying to God! He who believes God the most readily, and accepts his offers the most willingly, and embraces the promised privileges the most closely and unreservedly, be assured he honours God the most. For however we may imagine the contrary, it is simply unbelief which lies at the bottom of our hesitation, and tempts us to reject the proffered inheritance, because we doubt the voice which offers it. If your heart faint within you because the salvation of Jesus Christ is too simple, too gratuitous, too abundant to be true, let your earnest prayer be, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!"⁸ and relax not your endeavours, cease not from this prayer until you have by the grace given unto you, received all that the Gospel has spoken, and taken the Saviour, as your own full and sufficient Saviour, to your heart. This it is which can alone give peace to the wounded conscience and rest to the

⁸ Mark ix. 24.

troubled soul—the reposing it for time and for eternity upon the one great oblation which the Lord Jesus Christ has offered, and which his Spirit is ever ready to apply to all who seek it.

Jacob's incredulity (natural as it unquestionably was from all that had preceded) was conquered not by the arguments of his children, but by the affectionate and delightful messages of his absent son, and was soon succeeded by the most sincere sensations of gratitude and joy. “They told him all the words of Joseph which he had said unto them; and when he saw the waggons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived, and Israel said, It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive, I will go and see him before I die.”⁹

Christian brethren, may the remains of incredulity in your bosoms be extinguished by the same gentle means, eradicated by the same tender method.

⁹ Gen. xlv. 27, 28.

Unbelief does not usually yield to argument; "With the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness,"¹ says the Scripture, and experience fully justifies it. May the words which you are privileged to hear from time to time, not merely convince your understanding, but by the Holy Spirit of power and love, be instrumental in softening and changing your heart; the words, not of man, but of Christ himself, inviting you who thirst to come without money and without price unto him and drink; calling you who labour and are heavy laden, and affectionately assuring you that he will give rest; may these his own declarations, accompanied as they will be to all who seek it, by the felt and acknowledged presence of Him who spake them, fully satisfy you that the invitations of your Redeemer, and the offers of his purchased inheritance, are not too free, not too bountiful, not too unrestricted, to be

¹ Rom. x. 10.

most literally and most blessedly true. And as the spirit of Jacob revived when he beheld the waggons which were to convey him to his son, so may it be your privilege, that by all the dispensations which your Lord shall send to bring you nearer to himself, your spirits may be revived, sustained, and comforted; and that in the very hour of your departure from the country in which you are travelling, to the fair land where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, the language of your soul may be, "It is enough: I am willing to take my journey, not merely to leave a land of famine and of trouble, or to throw off this mortal body which is for ever harassed by sorrow or tormented by sin," but with the Apostle, "I am willing rather to be absent from the body, that I may be present with the Lord."² "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."³

² 2 Cor. v. 8.³ Luke ii. 29.

LECTURE VIII.

GENESIS XLVII. 8, 9.

"AND PHARAOH SAID UNTO JACOB, HOW OLD ART THOU?
AND JACOB SAID UNTO PHARAOH, THE DAYS OF THE
YEARS OF MY PILGRIMAGE ARE AN HUNDRED AND
THIRTY YEARS: FEW AND EVIL HAVE THE DAYS OF
THE YEARS OF MY LIFE BEEN, AND HAVE NOT AT-
TAINED UNTO THE DAYS OF THE YEARS OF THE
LIFE OF MY FATHERS IN THE DAYS OF THEIR PIL-
GRIMAGE."

WE are this morning to review the closing scene of the life of that patriarch who has formed the subject of the short course of Lectures in which we have lately been engaged. Let us, before we do so, return our sincere and humble thanks to the Giver of all good, for that measure of his grace with which he has been mercifully pleased to bless the undertaking, and for permitting us, contrary almost to our ex-

pectation, thus to bring it uninterruptedly to a conclusion. Most inadequately as this instructive subject has been treated, we would still venture to believe that the divine blessing has not been entirely withheld; that some among you may have been led, while meditating upon the life of this man of God, to search the more earnestly, to scrutinize the more carefully your own bosoms, to observe whether your worldly comforts are leading you, as they appear in the course of this history too often to have led the patriarch, further from God; whether your trials and your afflictions have been the painful, but salutary means of bringing you nearer to Him; whether you, like Jacob, are fully penetrated with a deep sense of your own unworthiness and sin, are trusting to the blood of the everlasting covenant, and to that alone, for your acceptance with God, and as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, are seeking a better country, and a more enduring inheritance.

If there be any among you who have been thus influenced by the subject in which we have been engaged, to look more seriously than you have hitherto done into your own life and conversation ; and if when comparing them with this holy man of old, you find there is a sad and fearful difference—that the spiritual religion of the Bible differs widely from that which you have embraced—that the true and living faith is a far more influential grace than you have found it—that the consistent, self-denying obedience of this holy man was of a very different nature from your own—that the love of God in Christ Jesus brought with it into his bosom such peace as passeth man's understanding, such joy and strong consolation as you have never known, we should as a last, as a parting request, ask this at your hands—that you would “search the Scriptures”¹ daily for yourselves, with carefulness, thoughtfulness, and prayer,

¹ John v. 39.

and with the Bereans of old, "see whether these things be so."² Take nothing upon the credit of mere human teachers, but bring every opinion, every doctrine, every word of the preacher to the touchstone of divine truth: "Try the spirits whether they are of God,"³ and may the Holy Spirit of light and grace direct you in your search, until you have indeed discovered the pearl of great price; until you have found Him of whom Moses and the prophets did write; and until, by the grace which is given you, He, even the Lord Jesus whom we preach, "is made unto you wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption."⁴

We resume the history in which we are engaged, at that point of time when Jacob, having received with gratitude and joy the tidings of his long-lost son, had formed the immediate resolution,

² Acts xvii. 11.

³ 1 John iv. 1.

⁴ 1 Cor. i. 30.

“I will go and see him before I die.”⁵ Doubtless the delight of the anticipated meeting was the predominant feeling in the mind of the patriarch at this period, yet must there have mingled with it some strong sensations of regret upon bidding farewell to scenes endeared to him by the blessings, the mercies, and even the very sorrows through which he had passed. In Canaan he had spent the days of his infancy, and his youth; there he had been elevated from the poor and houseless wanderer to the wealthy and powerful patriarch: and, of far greater importance, there ‘the Almighty had first revealed himself to him as a covenant God, and had recognised him as his servant, his child, his heir! Neither was the land endeared to Jacob only by these important circumstances: it was hallowed also by many sorrowful and painful recollections. In Canaan was the burial-place of his fond and partial mother;

⁵ Gen. xlv. 28.

there he had closed the eyes of his father ; and there also he had deposited the wife of his bosom. Whatever, therefore, may have been the joy with which the patriarch looked towards Egypt, there was sufficient in the land which he was leaving to soberize his anticipations, and to send him in these moments of happiness to the same throne of grace which he had so often visited in trouble and affliction. It is deeply interesting to the Christian to observe that it had this effect, that before Jacob quitted the land of Canaan, as we are expressly told, even at Beersheba, the border town, he not only betook himself to prayer, but he "offered sacrifice unto the God of his father Isaac."⁶ That is, he once more, in a specific act, declared his own utter unworthiness, by thus not presuming to approach the Almighty without a propitiatory offering ; and he again demonstrated to his assembled household, that

⁶ Gen. xlv. 1.

whether in adversity or prosperity, in sorrow or in joy, he was equally devoted to the Lord, and equally dependent for his acceptance upon that ever blessed Redeemer, of whom the sacrifices which Jacob offered were the acknowledged types.

Most encouraging was the reception Jacob met with from the Lord, viz., "I will go down with thee into Egypt."⁷ Identically the same promise of the divine presence and protection, now that Jacob was rich and increased in goods, and surrounded by a family of threescore and ten souls, as he had before received when he lay at Bethel, with the ground for his bed and with the stones for his pillow, a destitute and solitary wanderer. He who knows all our weakness, well knows that though we may seek him most when depressed by poverty or affliction, we do not need him less when elated by abundance or

⁷ Gen. xlv. 4.

success. If God be not with us, if he withdraw his protecting hand from about our path, or his Holy Spirit from our heart, all the wealth of Egypt will not make us rich, and all the joys of earth will leave us destitute and comfortless as they found us.

Under the divine guidance, Jacob performed in safety his long and wearisome journey, and (according to the promise of the Almighty) was blessed by the reunion with his favourite son. Very simple, and yet very affecting, is the inspired historian's account of that meeting. "And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him, and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while."⁸ It is delightful to observe, that a long residence in the cold and noxious atmosphere of a court had neither chilled the filial affection of Joseph, nor destroyed his re-

⁸ Gen. xlyi. 29.

verential respect for his parent. Although the second personage in Egypt, Joseph tarries not his father's arrival, but goes forth respectfully and dutifully to meet him upon the journey. Would that, at the present day, my brethren, such examples of filial duty were less infrequent ! A duty which, next to our duty to God, claims most imperatively the attention of the Christian. Vain, most vain and delusive, is every profession of religion, which does not evidence its reality by shedding its hallowed influences over all the relative duties of life ; which does not demonstrate that the truly Christian son and daughter are not only the most consistent and obedient worshippers of their heavenly Father, but, at the same time, the most cheerfully, most respectfully affectionate children of their earthly parents. These are among the fairest fruits by which men discern the good tree. Would that every one of our younger hearers would mark this most

attentively! For be assured that you cannot honour God more than by honouring those whom he thus, by the laws of nature, has placed over you. We have sometimes seen (and we have seen it with grief and disappointment) an increasing acquaintance with the great truths of religion producing a different effect, and have beheld the child using the first season of spiritual light to discern and descry the faults, or omissions, or ignorance of a parent. Be assured this is no genuine fruit of the religion of Him whose subjection to his earthly parents, and whose dying solicitude for the welfare of his mother, were among the brightest traits of his all-perfect character. Never can the constraining love of Christ shed abroad in your bosom, find a more delightful or appropriate exercise, than while influencing you to watch over the declining years, or to soothe the parting hours of those who ministered to your wants before you were able to express

them, and who loved you with the most unwearied affection, at a time when you were known only, and loved only, by God and by themselves.

The first incident recorded by the inspired historian, after the reunion between the aged patriarch and his favourite son, is of a very pleasing and edifying nature, no less than the introduction of Jacob to the king of Egypt, who had been so long the patron and the friend of Joseph. The particulars of this meeting, while they afford us a striking picture of the simplicity of manners long since gone by, present us also with a lesson which will never be out of date, and which we beseech the Holy Spirit of God to impart, not only to every one of us here present, but to our children and our children's children to the "third and fourth generation."

"Joseph," says the historian, "brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.”⁹ Such was the answer of the patriarch! And is this the manner in which an aged man of God looks back upon the years that are fled? Are one hundred and thirty years, when life is drawing to a close, considered but a few? and is such a life as Jacob’s spoken of as evil? How different then is human life, when looked back upon from the eminence of three-score years; how widely different from that immeasurably long and gay and flowery road which it appears at its commencement! Yet this was the testimony of a wise, a prosperous, a pious, and, as life is constituted, a happy man. He

⁹ Gen. xlvii. 7—9.

denominates life “ a pilgrimage ;” he reckons it by the “ days of the years ” which are fled, and he pronounces them “ few and evil ! ” We have, in the course of these Lectures, endeavoured frequently, plainly, and we trust, faithfully and affectionately, to address our younger brethren upon those points in the life or character of Jacob, which appeared more peculiarly applicable to their own ; permit us, then, upon the present occasion, to address a different class, or rather permit the patriarch, for his words require neither addition or explanation ; permit one older than yourselves to address those among you who are advanced in life, who have seen its brightest and its happiest hours, and are now entering upon the vale of tears, the last short passage which precedes the tomb, and the eternity awaiting you ! Listen, while one, upon whose head the snows of sixscore years had settled, assures you of this incontestable truth, that “ few and evil are the days of

the years " of the longest and the holiest life on earth. How admirable a subject for self-examination and private reflection? Carefully inquire of your own bosoms, whether the estimate of life which you have formed be similar to this of the patriarch? whether it so influence you, that you are the more actively employing your remaining faculties and years for the honour of God, because they are " few ; " and the more deeply bewailing the days that are passed, and the more fervently seeking forgiveness for them, through the blood of Jesus, because they are " evil." This is a solemn inquiry, God grant that it may meet with that reception in your bosoms which it merits. " The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." ¹ But do not, for the sake of Him who died for you, do not trifle in ascertaining that this is the case with yourselves; that you are " in the way of righteousness," the Lord's

¹ Prov. xvi. 31.

highway, through which "the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; when they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."² A life of industry, a life of honour and integrity, a life of success and of applause among men, however long, or (speaking after the manner of men) however irreproachable, will not stand the scrutinizing eye of your God. Essentially necessary as such a life unquestionably is as the fruits of your faith, if you are looking to it to usurp the place of a justifying righteousness on the great day of account, we warn you, that you will find it worthless and insufficient: it will not, it cannot avert the condemnation, which a broken law will bring down on your devoted heads. Every other righteousness but the righteousness of your Redeemer will, as the meritorious cause of salvation, be cast aside as a

² Isaiah xxxv. 10.

tattered and a polluted garment, in the day when the king shall come in to see the guests,³ and when much that has been highly esteemed among men, will be found to be but "abomination in the sight of God."⁴ Earnestly search, therefore, whether the righteousness of Christ has been applied to your heart by a true and justifying faith; and whether in obedience to his commands, you are living such a holy, harmless, unworldly life, as becomes those who are not their own, but His who has bought them with a price, even the price of His own precious blood, poured forth on the accursed tree, in full and ample satisfaction for all the demands of an offended God. See whether you are forming a right estimate of time and of eternity, of heaven and hell. Do not cling to that which you cannot hold, and which is even now trembling in your nerveless grasp. Seek something more durable than even the

³ See Isa. lxiv. 6.

⁴ Luke xvi. 15.

earth on which you live ; seek a real saving interest in Him, whom rightly to know, is life eternal, and whom to love and to enjoy, forms the delight of heaven, and the never-varying subject of its harps. But if the urging you to look forward to those bright scenes beyond your present horizon do not influence you, look back with Jacob on the way which you have travelled, and see if sin and sorrow have not stamped the indelible character of evil on every mile of your journey. “Your fathers, where are they ?” the companions who entered life with you, whither are they gone ? Some who were stronger, many who were younger than you, have been cut off : and if you cast a careful glance along the way which you have travelled, you will find it but a line of cypresses and tombs ; mourning and death have left their traces on the road, intermingled only with mercies and sins.

My beloved brethren, these great

truths address themselves not to the aged alone, but to each, and to all. Whether we confess it, or confess it not, such is the melancholy retrospect. Our days at the best are evil; at the longest, they are few.. They are drawing to a close; and, whether prepared or unprepared, we are moving rapidly forward. The last stage of our journey opens upon us; we cannot delay—we cannot, for a single hour, procrastinate its conclusion. And what a conclusion will it be to those among us who are only alive to the labours or the pleasures of the journey, but dead to what awaits them upon their journey's end! We dare not attempt to describe the termination of their path. To the heart of a Christian, its progress is sufficiently appalling: to mark the careless, thoughtless mien of those who are travelling on the broad road which leads to destruction; to see the votaries of folly and of pleasure, while good men are praying for them,

and the very angels of heaven weeping at their obduracy and impenitence, and it may be, the great and blessed Intercessor himself striving for them before the throne of his heavenly Father, to see them alone, throughout all the creation of God, the only things which neither minister to his glory, nor hymn his praise, nor deprecate his unquenchable wrath, but travel on happily and unconcernedly, making a mock of sin, denying the Lord who bought them, and despising the proffered joys of heaven. To mark the daily progress of a thoughtless, careless sinner, is one of the most painful trials of the Christian; but, to describe the termination, is as impossible as it would be agonizing and appalling. What human tongue can tell—what finite apprehension conceive, the despair, the remorse, the agony of that tremendous day, when the Lord shall “look out” in anger on those who have defied his wrath, disdained his commands, neg-

lected his Son; when, in the plain, but emphatic language of the Psalmist, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God."⁵

Proceed we to the concluding scene of the history before us. "And the time drew nigh," says the inspired historian, "that Israel must die."⁶ Let us, then, in imagination, enter the tent of the departing patriarch; let us draw round his dying bed. We have followed him through the chequered scenes of his eventful pilgrimage; we have seen how a man of God can live—let us now behold how he can die. What a calm scene of resignation and of holy confidence do we witness! There is, indeed, nothing of triumph or of rapture, but all bespeaks the last hours of one at peace with God, and God with him; one, as he declared himself, who "had been redeemed from all evil."⁷ We behold the aged saint like a full shock of corn,

⁵ Ps. ix. 7. ⁶ Gen. xlvii. 29. ⁷ Gen. xlviii. 16.

coming in in its season, waiting to be removed into the imperishable garner. Joseph and his sons are at the bed's head, and all the sons of Jacob are gathered round their departing father. Now does the dying patriarch act faith upon the promises of God for the last time. Yet a few short moments, and faith will for ever cease—exchanged for the perfect vision and the fullest enjoyment. Yet to these last hours has the Apostle to the Hebrews borne his testimony, when he said, “By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.”⁸

“Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see : and Joseph brought his sons near unto him ; and he kissed them, and embraced them,”⁹ “and he blessed Joseph and said—God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk, the God which led me

⁸ Heb. xi. 21.

⁹ Gen. xlviii. 10.

all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads;" and having then proceeded to bless his assembled family in a strain of prophecy which has excited the wonder of the Church of God, even to the present hour, he thus interrupted his discourse to express shortly, but emphatically, the last strong feelings which filled his dying bosom: "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."¹

Death was no new subject to him; salvation not an untried theme; the grave no strange country; heaven not an unlooked for home. He had "waited" for the Angel of the Covenant, who had redeemed him, even "the Angel Jehovah," the Lord Jesus Christ, to send his messenger to summon him into the eternal presence; and the language of Jacob's heart had long been this—"I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

All the ardent expectation of a new

¹ Gen. xlix. 18.

convert, who is longing to depart and be with Christ, tempered by all the patient resignation of the aged Christian, who knows, if the Almighty make him wait, it is for some wise and gracious purpose, and feels assured that God's times are always the best times. It was in this state of meek and peaceful reliance on Him "in whom he had believed," that the aged patriarch might have said with Job, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come."² That change was now at hand, even at the door—a fearful change for the ungodly, a solemn change for all. We read, "When Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people,"³ breathing his placid soul into the bosom of him he loved. Thus, "the work of righteousness was peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and

² Job xiv. 14.³ Gen. xlix. 33.

assurance for ever.”⁴ Who can witness it, who can hear of it, even as we do this day, after an interval of four thousand years, without a secret aspiration arising from his heart, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his !”⁵

Christian brethren, we trust we are addressing many who could, at this moment, say with the patriarch, “I also have waited for thy salvation, O Lord ;” or, in the still plainer language of the apostle to the Thessalonians, I “wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered me from the wrath to come.” How great and blessed are your privileges, if you are thus “waiting” to reign with him in glory, upon whom you have lived by faith on earth. Behold, with what manner of love the Father hath loved you, that such a promise should be your own ! “What manner

⁴ Isa. xxxii. 17.

⁵ Numb. xxiii. 10.

of persons ought you then to be in all holy conversation and godliness.”⁶ Live worthy of these unspeakable privileges; cherish the grace which God has so abundantly bestowed upon you, in uniting you to Christ, your living head; avoid everything which would sully the brightness of your faith, or damp the ardour of your grateful love; live near to him, out of whose fulness you receive grace for grace, and suffer nothing which this world can offer to intimidate you, or to allure you to live contrary to your convictions, or to deny Him before men, who is willing to confess you before the angels of God.

“ Few and evil the days of the years of your pilgrimage ” still may be ; many may be the crosses to be carried, the disappointments to be borne, the troubles to be endured, but He who has given you his Son, is with Him also freely giving you all things. These light afflictions are but for a moment; the heaviness is

⁶ 2 Peter iii. 11.

but for a night ; joy, everlasting joy, will come upon the wings of the approaching morning. Only relax not in your efforts ; act not as if you thought you had “ already attained, either were already perfect ; ” ⁷ but with the apostle, “ forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” The struggles of the conflict will soon be over—every enemy vanquished, every battle won ; the dust shall be wiped from your brow, the tears from your eyes ; and that bright crown to which you now are looking shall be your own, when you shall, through the alone merits of your Redeemer, sit down with him of whom we have been speaking, with Abraham, with Isaac and JACOB, amidst the fulness of imperishable joys, in your Father’s kingdom, and upon your Redeemer’s throne.

⁷ Phil. ii. 12—14.

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